

# PERSIA & THE CREATION OF JUDAISM

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**Abstract:** *This article explain how Judaism was created by the Persians in the fifth century BCE. Colonists were deported into Yehud. Their reward was to have control of a temple state which collected taxes for Persia. Only priests of the temple state were Jews—a nation of priests to serve Persians.*

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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 1. The Crisis of Sacred History

### Divine Crisis

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Given that most of the events described in the bible had taken place many centuries prior to the time that they were written down, it is extremely difficult to know when they are factual historical accounts and when they are partly allegorical.

Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson,  
*The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*

#### The Divine Crisis

- ☐ Just how old is the *Old Testament*?
- ☐ Did the House of David really exist?
- ☐ Is King Solomon a fantasy?
- ☐ If Jesus was a descendant of David and Solomon and they didn't really exist, how can we know whether Jesus really existed?

William G Dever, the former head of the University of Arizona's Near Eastern studies department answers questions like this. Dever, after more than 30 seasons of fieldwork in Israel, 12 years as director of the American post-graduate research center, has been a UA professor for 22 years, and was head of the largest graduate program in Near Eastern archaeology in the world. He is a leading spokesman for American and Israeli archaeologists who oppose what he and others call a "Divine Crisis" because of "revisionists" and their ideological agenda. He, of course, has no "ideological agenda".

Work begun in the 1970s by Thomas Thompson and John Van Seters has spoiled the earlier consensus that the bible was historical, and opposite positions of "minimalists" and maximalists have emerged. The minimalists, also called "revisionists" and "nihilists", see minimal historical value in the bible, and would radically correct Jewish history to dispose of early myths that find no basis in real history having left no trace in contemporary annals and archaeology. Maximalists, also called "literalists", and even "fundamentalists", see the bible as historical, and would rather revise history to fit the bible than do the reverse.

Minimalists ask of biblical texts: Who wrote them and why? Whose purpose did they serve? To whom were they addressed? The Patriarchs, Moses, Joshua and the so-called conquest, David and Solomon have all been challenged on the basis of evidence, or the profound absence of it. Nothing distinguishes Israelites from Canaanites, and the history of *Samuel* and *Kings* is basically fiction, albeit with "an often realistic and accurate setting".

The crisis has come to a head during the last decade because the "revisionists", mainly European scholars, argue that the Jewish bible was written, almost in its entirety, much later than traditional scholars accept—the bible was not written during the Iron Age (c 1200-600 BC) when many of its stories are set, but in the Persian (the fifth century) and Hellenistic periods (the third to first century BC). According to Thomas L Thompson, of

Copenhagen, “The bible’s stories are not about history at all”.

## History or Historiography?

An innocent layman, even one not particularly interested in religion, might wonder why we have to inquire into the history of Israel. It seems to be set out in astonishing detail in the Jewish scriptures—so well set out, the religious person might add, that they must be God’s word! The same layman might have the same thought about Christian origins. They too seem to be well described in the *New Testament*.

The truth is that religious history is not history. A historian wants to know what happened in history, and why, accepting that the natural world was subject to the same laws then as it is today. The religious writer wants to persuade their readers that their own religious viewpoint is the one to hold and, if they agree, to give them some moral codes to live by. In this way they hope to control their existence. History is scientific but religious history is tendentious. When history is written for some purpose other than to investigate the past then it becomes historiography—the art of the monks—polemic writing disguised as history. That is what the bible is.

To paraphrase a “revisionist”, Philip R Davies, of Sheffield University, the notion of an “ancient” or “biblical” Israel is a “modern conception”, perpetuated by Jewish and Christian writers for the same theological reasons as the writers and editors of the Jewish bible. If the revisionists are right, then the Jewish bible is a collection of myths, fantastic tales, and late religio-political propaganda—a “pious fraud” containing little history, and that little is hard to discern among the fiction.

## Contradictions and Unreason

If the contention that biblical Israel is fiction is extreme, the response to legitimate questioning of biblical texts is more extreme. William G Dever blames it all on “postmodernism” or “political correctness”, and concludes:

Ancient Israel is a fact. That this historical Israel does not correspond in all details with the ‘ideal theological Israel’ portrayed in the Hebrew bible is true. In the end, however, that is irrelevant.

Roy Vince describes the article in which this appears (*Save Us from Postmodern Malarkey*, BAR 26, 2000) as  
One of the most vicious “scholarly” attacks I have ever seen.

Perhaps he has not come across Gary A Rendsburg, an odious Cornell University biblicalist who seems to think he is at the “cutting edge of Jewish studies”, as he puts it. Rendsburg thinks biblical Studies have gone from consensus to crisis. The consensus was that the bible contains “reliable historical information” that had been passed down “accurately”. Any contradictions are “minor problems” for the basic storyline is “trustworthy”.

The crisis is “relativism, skepticism, and indeed nihilism” which now dominates. “The arm of Marxism had spread to biblical studies”. Some minimalists “are driven by Marxism and leftist politics”. Some of them are “counterculture people, left over from the 60s and 70s, whose personality includes the questioning of authority in all aspects of their lives”. Some of them are even former evangelical Christians who now see the evils of their former ways. So, they are not all bad, then! At this rate, some of them might even be normal human beings!



Our bad-mouthing “scholar” admits Albright (the doyen of traditional biblicists) overstated the case, but not too seriously! His group later would come under attack by what their detractors would term parallelomania, and some of these great scholars often went too far in making connexions between the bible and the ancient world. But even though they made all these errors, at least they were clever! Minimalists are no good at anything.

Anson Rainey of Tel Aviv University has noted that Thompson, Davies, Lemche, and Whitelam (minimalist scholars) have never excavated an archaeological site or translated an archive of ancient Near Eastern texts, so they are “untrained”, and produce only “baseless twaddle”. Rendsburg goes on. “With the current group of revisionists, ideology, not objective scholarship, governs”. “If it is not actual Marxism, it is leftist politics in general”. What is more, “almost without exception, the scholars of this group are not Jewish!” They “are driven by anti-Zionism approaching anti-Semitism”. Cornell used to have a good reputation.

It is plain enough that this deep thinker slings around every insult he can find in his limited political repertory, and only succeeds in painting “idiot” all over himself. Rendsburg simply cannot see the wood for the trees. He is utterly blinded by his own rage. He quotes Robert Farrell on the Danish poem *Beowulf* because “the fact that a literary work is a literary work first and foremost, with its own agenda, does not automatically mean that it lacks any historical value altogether:”

Beowulf is a work of heroic history, a poem in which facts and chronology are subservient to the poet's interest in heroic deeds and their value in representing the ethics of an heroic civilization. A poet writing in this mode does not disregard absolute historical fact, history, that is, as we know it. He rather sees it as less important than other considerations... His account will sometimes mesh reasonably well with history, as in the episode of Hygelac's raid on the Frisian shore. But more often, his work will be a freely woven structure in which the characters and actions of the past will be part of an ethically satisfying narrative.

Robert Farrell

Rendsburg comments:

The same words could apply to the Torah. The narrative is based on historical facts known to the author, but the author is more interested in presenting an “ethically satisfying narrative”. So while the author “does not disregard absolute historical fact, history, that is”, these facts take a back seat to the main thrust of the story.

Shakespeare's histories are literary creations, but one would not deny the actual existence of the kings themselves. Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* has a 1950s agenda, but the basic story line of the Salem witch hunts of colonial Massachusetts is historically accurate. And Robert Altman's film *M\*A\*S\*H* and the television series which followed speak clearly to the 1960s and 1970s anti-Vietnam War generation, but this does not mean that the Korean War is a fictional invention of the writers.

These citations show that Rendsburg has lost his track. He has forgotten what he is talking about. If he has not, then he never knew, and he is saying that others need training. Yet the minimalist argument is simple. He is quite right to say that *Beowulf* is similar to the Jewish scriptures, in that the authors do not disregard historical fact, but these facts take a back seat to their main purpose. Minimalists agree! That is what they are

saying! Literary books might contain history, but without reference to external evidence no one knows what it is! Shakespeare's historical plays contain history, and so does *Beowulf*, *The Crucible* and *M\*A\*S\*H*, but Rendsburg has forgotten that we already know what is history and what is drama in these cases. We know that King Henry V was based in history and King Lear was not. If we did not know, then we might suppose Lear to be historical because the other plays are about historical kings. Much of the Jewish scriptures is King Lear—it bears little relationship to history, as Rendsburg seems to concur—and what is, like Henry V, based on history we do not know without external evidence. He concludes:

There still can be history in these texts, even if we would not wish to create true history based on these texts alone. Obviously, the narrative cannot be taken at face value for the recovery of ancient Israelite history. But at the same time, especially when a variety of sources from the ancient Near East confirms elements of the biblical narrative, we are absolutely justified in using the bible as a source for recovering the early history of Israel.

He gives an example. A text from Ugarit includes a trade agreement between merchants of Ugarit and those of Ur (Urfa, the birthplace of Abraham) negotiated by the king of the Hittites, as both cities were his. The merchants of Ur could trade in Ugarit, but could not buy land or property, or settle permanently there. In *Genesis* 34:10, the people of Shechem offer Jacob and his family these same three rights:

And ye shall dwell with us: and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade ye therein, and get you possessions therein.

So, *Genesis* 34:10 seems to reflect real history of roughly the right time for Jacob. QED, Rendsburg seems to think. But it took the Ugarit tablets to confirm it as other than fiction, and even then we are not sure it is history unless we know that the three elements are peculiar to the time and place and not common to agreed resettlement elsewhere in the ANE BC.

Is this arrogant and insulting “intellectual” really so blind or ignorant that he cannot see that he is epitomising the minimalist position, and not refuting it. Minimalists say precisely that “the narrative cannot be taken at face value for the recovery of ancient Israelite history”, and precisely that the Jewish scriptures are indeed only valid “when a variety of sources from the ancient Near East” confirms them. Quite frankly, there is only one conclusion from this astonishing example of McGill and Cornell “scholarly” debate. The man is so emotionally entangled in an irrational hatred that he has lost his marbles. Is it the function of prestigious universities and their publications to give a platform for such manic hate and unreason?

## **Biblical Archaeology**

Oddly, Professor Dever, in his understanding of Israel's early formative years, recognizes he differs little from the revisionists, despite his huffing and puffing. Dever counts himself among those who accept the Jewish scriptures “to the extent that it can be corroborated by archaeological scholarship”. He wrote a popular book to “isolate a core history, using archaeology as a supplement and corrective to the text of the Hebrew bible where it is biased, exaggerated, or too selective to be an adequate source for history”.

Dever provoked the “biblical archaeology” debate in the 1970s about whether “biblical archaeology” might be

better termed “Syro-Palestinian archaeology”.

1. Biblical does not mean a single period but a literary genre. There is no Iliadic Archaeology or Beowulfic Archaeology.
2. “Biblical” is too broad a term. Anywhere mentioned in the bible over 2000 years might be considered biblical.
3. Biblical refers to nothing that archaeologists do as archaeologists, excavating, cataloguing finds, tracing the development and evolution of material culture.

Dever’s reasonable case lost, even though most full-time archaeologists from the United States and virtually all from Europe and Israel favored Dever’s suggestion. Biblicists and theologians did not. Furthermore, Ziony Zevit in *Biblica* 83 (2002) tells us frankly:

The overwhelming majority of excavators interested in biblical periods who work in Israel and Jordan were not full-time archaeologists. Most are employed at seminaries or denominational institutions where they teach Bible or courses with names like “Ancient Israelite Civilization”.

They refused a terminology that did not declare clearly that this archaeology was biblical. Even more important to them was that the new terminology would have made it harder for biblical phonies to get financial support from patrons and institutions for their phony scholarship, and to recruit gullible believers for their amateur archaeology.

They argued “biblical” was appropriate as long as it was understood as meaning a particular people in a particular place and time—Israelites in the Land of Israel from the Iron Age until the days of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Persian period which followed the Iron Age, c 1200-332 BC, or even Jesus, Paul and the early church. It was similar in this sense to “Roman” or “Greek” applied to branches of classical archaeology. K F Kell had long ago defined biblical archaeology thus:

By biblical archaeology or knowledge of antiquity we mean the scientific representation of the way of life of the Israelite people as the only nation of antiquity that God had selected as bearer of revelations recorded in the Bible.

This archaeology is not scientific but a branch of exegetical theology. So, theologians would not let go of it, even though it begs the question. Indeed, because it does!

Dever must have been attacking, rightly, those using biblical theology for archaeological interpretation, though he was chary about raising it as an issue in public. The reason was most biblical scholars assumed that, if archeology could demonstrate that something might have occurred, then when the bible so indicated, it *had* occurred. This is called euphemistically “giving the bible the benefit of the doubt”. It is given this large degree of benefit because God wrote it. Such “bible is true” thinking gave the biblicist scholars a halo that seemed to make these Enochs think they were walking with God. “Predications were raised to prominence as proclamation while events tested and not found wanting were esteemed as witnesses to the proclamation. Events found wanting, such as the enslavement of Israelites in Egypt, were classified as myth, their lack of historicity ignored”.

Dever lost the debate because there are many more bible teachers in the world than archaeologists. Theologically driven biblicists wanted to retain their claim over archaeological data. Dogma defeated enquiry, religion dictated to science.

Syro-Palestinian archaeology was accepted in professional circles, and is now used in departments of archaeology, anthropology and history. Biblical archaeology became a word used by Christian popularisers and apologists in their propaganda publicised in magazines and popular books, mostly pandering to people's ideas half remembered from schooldays and thought possibly to have some truth. Zevit concludes:

The debate had precipitated changes beyond professional terminology. It had disseminated the notion that the Albrightian synthesis of biblical studies and archaeology no longer maintained its integrity...

Dever categorically assures us that biblical archaeology is "long since dead" and "few mourn its passing", yet the term biblical archaeology is still used by scholars to mean the interface between proper Levantine archaeology and biblical studies. Do those who use the term biblical archaeology know that it now has this restricted sense, or could they still be labouring under the impression that it was what it formerly was? If the scholars do know, do the clergymen and the earnest preachers of the Word also know? Should someone tell them? Many of these people are quoting selectively from modern workers, or superseded work to support their mythical beliefs.

In Dever's view as a professional archaeologist, "The bible is about real people in a real time and place—like us". In short, he is like the notorious W F Albright, an archaeologist who achieved world fame by refusing to let archaeology speak for itself, but incessantly forced it into the straitjacket of the biblical account of Jewish history. Joel Sweek says, about Dever:

Dever, while having at one time given out the suggestion of opposition to biblical archaeology, nonetheless can write passages that sound neo-Albrightian.

Only when revisionist biblical scholars began to invoke archaeological data, having lost confidence in the biblical texts as sources for history writing did archaeologists working in Israel become involved. Dever, like Rainey, says non-specialists are simply not competent to deal with the mass of complex data that will soon truly revolutionize the writing of ancient Israel's history and religions, rather than the fashion for revisionist theories. Like Rainey, Dever criticizes Philip Davies, as a revisionist, for *not* being an archaeologist, as if only archaeologists can understand archaeologists.

If this is true, then archaeologists might as well be confined to their own asylum. The point of archaeology must be to illuminate history. If this is not its point, then it has only one other possible purpose—to confuse history by digging away whatever might actually illuminate it if read properly, and by issuing utterly false accounts of what has been found. If the archaeologists genuinely seek to illuminate history but refuse to give accounts of their work that are intelligible to non-archaeologists, then again their discipline is valueless for the majority of us. Once archaeologists have clearly explained what they have found, there is no reason at all why historians who are not archaeologists should not interpret it. The archaeologists can present us with their data but we are not obliged to accept their opinions, especially when we have better ones. One suspects that this is one of Dever's

problems.

Writing of Thomas L Thompson seeing the Persian period as the earliest admissible context for the biblical romance, Dever calls him a “nihilist”. The ones who seek out tenable theories to explain the nature of the Jewish scriptures are nihilists while the dead heads that believe in a supernatural ogre playing toy soldiers with the human race are purveying pure truth as golden sunbeams. We should be seeking to understand the reasons for what we see in the ground, confident that the finger of God has nothing to do with it, but human motives, movements and ideologies do.

Dever admits that his views of the Patriarchal period and the Exodus are as minimalist as any minimalist. He must mean that he accepts they are mythical. But he is not at all minimalist about the Iron Age and the United Monarchy. Dever accuses “revisionists”, who deny any state of Israel before about 850 BC of “ignorance”, and adds that Israel Finkelstein, who Dever recognizes as being the authority on the Iron Age sites of Palestine, holds a minority view in asserting no ethnic distinctions can be made from the evidence, and there is no basis for distinguishing an “early Israel” in the early Iron Age. Plainly, people lived in the Palestinian hills in the twelfth century BC but only biblicists call them Israelites as opposed to Canaanites, like the rest of the population.

So, when Dever refers to the Iron Age or “Israelite” period, he classifies himself. He wants revisionists to refute the data, in typical evangelic style, as if the data are unequivocal. What the revisionists do is refute the biblicist interpretation. The inference that there is any sign of cultural change in the data that might suggest a different people appearing is what is refutable. As Finkelstein declares, there is no such sign. The data show continuity of occupation. One thing only impels biblicists to see phantom signs—their reading of the bible!

Dever is keen on showing the unanimity of those who support the idea of the scriptures being written in the Iron Age. “I and all other archaeologists I know (along with most mainstream biblical scholars) put the context in the Iron Age”. So all the archaeologists he knows are in the same camp as mainstream biblical scholars—presumably that can only mean they accept the finger wagging view of history. But what does he mean by putting “the context in the Iron Age?” The Jewish scriptures are set entirely in the Iron Age. It has no other context. It could have been written in its entirety at the end of the Iron Age in the Persian period, but could not have been written at the court of king David, as biblicists want to believe. He has to concede that these miraculously early histories were edited “rather late”.

Dever maintains a larger issue is “How do we know what we claim to know? How can we communicate that knowledge with any confidence?” Dever blames the lack of rationality he thinks he perceives on postmodernism, and its weapon, “deconstruction”, challenging the “positivist paradigm” of the Enlightenment, attacking reason and science as the basis of knowledge. Deconstruction, he says, approaches any text, ancient or modern, with suspicion, tearing it apart to reveal its supposed “inner contradictions”. Such “scholars” deny the book or work of art any inherent meaning. Ideology and politics—especially race, gender, and class—became the issues, not rationality. Deconstruction, Dever says, tends to intellectual anarchy and to anti-establishment politics. The “assault on reason” and radical reinterpretation of all ancient texts might pose a threat to the Western cultural tradition, founded as it is on the twin pillars of the biblical word-view and the modern Enlightenment.

It is difficult, subject to this criticism, to stand on any ground other than that on which Dever himself stands. If you offer evidence that a biblical text is mythical, then you are rejected as being postmodern, a grievous insult

implying you will not believe *any* documentary evidence. If you take a milder line and suggest that a biblical text is equivocal and offer an ideological reason why it might have been written rather than a supernatural one, then you are turning the biblical writers “on their heads” and treating them as “guilty until they are proven innocent”. Become more conciliatory still and suggest tentatively that biblical history might have been romanticized, then you are making out that “all knowledge” is just a “social construct”. The biblicist position is that any critic of the bible is an extremist until they accept that the bible is the true account of God’s finger wagging in Jewish history. Dever says the revisionists are off target “for all the noise” they make, and complains that they attack him as their *bête noire* while leaving others with the same views unmolested. The reason is plain enough. It is Dever who makes the noise because he is outraged that the revisionist view should be put at all. He repeatedly dismisses revisionists as being off the mainstream, an isolated but vocal minority. But he cannot resist his self imposed role as bulldog—the revisionist’s most persistent challenger in print. Of course, by writing a load of irate polemic to add to his 250 other papers, he can give himself more material to boost his self-citations.

Dever’s more serious charge is that revisionists, like Keith W Whitelam of Sterling University, have politicized archaeology by accusing American, and especially Israeli, archaeologists of conspiring to “rob the Palestinians of their history” through their tendentious support for biblical mythology. Dever’s concern is that eliminating “ancient Israel” from history will challenge modern Israel’s right to exist. He concludes: “This challenge cannot go unmet”.

## Historians Resist Polemicists in Israel

### ASSOCIATED PRESS, JERUSALEM, 29 OCTOBER 1999

Archaeological findings do not support and in many cases directly contradict biblical stories describing the birth of the Jewish people, according to Zeev Herzog of Tel Aviv University. There was no exodus from Egypt, Joshua did not bring down the walls of Jericho, and Solomon’s kingdom was a small, tribal dynasty.

Colleagues and critics warned that by targeting the accuracy of the bible, the research undermines the national myths that are the basis of Jewish claims to the land of Israel.

Herzog reviewed evidence now commonly accepted by most archaeologists showing that there was no exodus from Egypt at the time the bible says, and that Jericho fell in stages over an extended period, not in a single raid led by Joshua. More controversially, Herzog argues that the seeds of the Jewish state are to be found in the 9th century BC when groups of shepherds who had settled in hilltops established two rival states, Judah and Israel.

Excavations of cities from the supposedly majestic time of kings David and Solomon a century earlier, he said, revealed that the “cities” were scattered buildings and the kingdoms were small, provincial dynasties that exercised no real claim over the land. Jerusalem, the capital built by king David to rule over an empire that spanned much of the Middle East, was a small fiefdom.



Fellow archaeologist Amnon Ben-Tor of the Hebrew University, a critic of Herzog and his post-modernist school of thought, said Herzog uses archaeology to satisfy a political agenda, namely debunking the legends upon which the Jewish state was founded. Ben-Tor agreed that “there is a large measure of glorification in the bible”, but said that inscriptions and excavations from the 10th century BC show the ancient Hebrews had established a state ruled by David and Solomon, that was substantial if not magnificent.

Lawmaker Tommy Lapid, a secular rights champion who believes human authors wrote the bible, accused Herzog of trying to undermine the educational and ideological basis of the state. Herzog is “feeding propaganda to Israel’s enemies who want to negate our right to be here”, Lapid said. The bible contained many myths, but its basic historical facts document Jewish claims on Israel and form the basis for Jewish history, culture, language and literature.

Herzog’s article addressed archaeological discoveries from the last few decades, which have not entered the public consciousness, said archaeologist Moshe Kochavi of Tel Aviv University, because Israelis are not ready to abandon their national myths. Kochavi said books publishing these findings have met with particularly vehement opposition from the 30 percent of Israeli Jews who define themselves as in some way religious, many of whom believe the bible is the word of God. “The religious scream out when books like these, saying there was no conquest and that David’s period was not majestic, are written”, he said.

Israeli adults and schoolchildren regularly tour archaeological sites that guides say prove the bible was right, and the state devotes substantial resources to excavations thought likely to reveal evidence of biblical footsteps. Liberal Education Minister Yossi Sarid, who recently stirred controversy by expunging from textbooks what he says are myths of modern Israeli history, said Herzog’s work deserved consideration. “If it is interesting and well-founded, I do not see why it should not be presented in schools as an option”, he told a Jerusalem newspaper. (Adapted from Sari Bashi.)

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In Israel, A Elon, a novelist, and Y Shavat, a historian, claim that the Israeli passion for archaeology—verging on a mania, according to Dever—is a secular religion, a sentiment for a lost past when God was your neighbour and the Good were safe. Surely this is precisely what biblical religions are. Tel Dan has been developed by the Israeli National Parks Authority, but is labelled by them in such an outrageously biblicist way that one suspects even they would blush. Then again, no. Yet, the “Haredin” of Israel, the ultra-orthodox right wing Jews, are violently opposed to archaeology, claiming that archaeologists are desecrating the sacred land. Really they fear that scientific investigation will disprove their religious tradition.

Ninety percent of fieldwork in Israel is sponsored by the Israeli government and subsidised by American institutions, and excavations are staffed by American students. Who would come to dig in these hot and unpleasant conditions except those who were motivated by a conviction that they were digging up God? Few indeed, and if this few, dedicated to archaeology rather than God, wanted to make archaeology of the Levant a career, they would be unlikely to get a post. The American university departments of biblical studies and biblical archaeology want committed evangelists, not skeptics. In any case, the university departments themselves are getting more cautious after modern archaeologists have dug down to the roots of the bible stories and found them rotten. Dever says the discipline of biblical archaeology in the US is dying and its funds drying up, even though popular interest is great. One might think *because* it is!

## Criticizing Postmodernism

Postmodernists often *do* seem to want to evade problems rather than solve them. Dever's points about the "scholarship" of deconstruction compared with careful cross-checking of source material to attempt to approach objectivity is surely valid. Deconstruction techniques might give a scholar some insights but, since these can hardly be anything other than subjective, they cannot alone be acceptable to anyone seeking some sort of objective truth.

David Clines of Sheffield University, explicitly presenting a postmodern agenda for biblical studies, says the tradition of scholarship does not matter very much, because the tradition enshrined and promoted the principles common to both dogmatic and modernist scholarship, the principles of a unified truth and a common quest for that truth that we were all engaged in—and "grand narratives" like that no longer carry conviction. Meaning matters too, but not some one right meaning because there is no such thing, but everyone's meanings for that is all there is.

Tamara Cohn Eskenazi agrees with Clines and defends postmodernist exegesis by asserting:

It is an error to construe postmodernism as a nihilist denial of meaning.

What it rejects is privileged claims on behalf of some essential meanings that persist in time through language or words.

According to deconstruction, the futile quest for authoritative, original meaning or permanent meaning is a misapprehension of what meaning is or how it operates.

The postmodernists sound as contrary as Professor Dever. Eskenazi's last statement contradicts the first. Words have a meaning intended by the author, and the fact that the words later do not seem clear is not to deny that the author had an intention to convey a particular meaning. Like many of these classically trained people calling themselves biblical scholars, she does not understand science, and thinks in terms of the creeds they are used to. Religions, not science, make "privileged claims on behalf of some essential meanings that persist in time through language or words". An "authoritative" meaning is quite different from a "permanent" one, and an original one might be neither. Religious souls believe in permanent meaning not scientific ones who know that discovery might require an authoritative interpretation to change.

The fact that postmodernists do not believe objectivity should be aimed for is reason enough for rational minds to reject it, but Dever uses it as a weapon, accusing his critics of postmodernism so that they can be written off.



In the same way, critics of conventional dating are written of as Velikovskian, but these are just sad ploys by people who have run out of arguments. Perfection in anything is impossible but that is no reason why anyone should not aim for perfection. The same is true of objectivity. It might be impossible but it is up to critics to show how it falls short and might be approached more closely, rather than saying, "It's hopeless. Let's forget about truth and make everything up".

Postmodernists note the axis of myth and history, with myth at the fictional pole and history at the factual pole, then note that history is often partly if not largely fictionalized while myth might be allegorical history and therefore contain historical truths. Apparently this is too hard for them to face, so they have come up with the "solution" of abolishing the distinction between history and myth. Instead it is all narrative to be essentially disbelieved except for whatever the reader decides to believe, having "deconstructed" the text! Any attempt to decide the degree of validity of a text by comparing it with agreed historical fact is for the birds. The acceptance of inbuilt bias that might be allowed for, or at least highlighted, seems insufficient for the postmodernist. Subjective writing cannot be avoided and so objectivity is discredited and discarded.

## **Objective History**

It can be said that objective history is impossible, as it is, but natural and inevitable bias is quite distinct from deliberately composing history to support a religious view. All good historians try to recognize prejudice and try to correct it whether in others or themselves. The historiographer is not interested in what is or was true but in what upholds a chosen view. It might be said that any revisionist is therefore a historiographer, and perhaps in a sense that is true, but the revisionist is nevertheless trying to correct an error to get at the historical truth. Revisionists are not trying to hide truth to uphold a dogma. When a bias can be seen in some historical work, the revisionist will try to point it out and correct it. The reader has access to both views and can judge.

The historiographer will not be challenged. Religious writers all lean in much the same direction, squabbling over arcane details to give an illusion of scholarship when they are all agreed on the bulk of the religious edifice they have. The reader, if unprepared, will get enmeshed in this esoteric quibbling about how God meant His bad communicating to be interpreted, and will finish up praying to empty space for help, by which time it is too late to get any.

Religious works that purport to be history cannot be assumed to be accurate until confirmed by independent means. It is not safe to accept, with the guardians of religion, that we should accept religious history unless it is proven wrong. It is safer to take the skeptical scientific view that it is myth, or at best legend, until it is proven true.

Nor can the logical jump be made that it is all correct because something in it has been shown to be historical—historiography often takes the form of historical fiction. It is put in a historical setting that might be more or less convincing, but a convincing setting cannot vouchsafe the central plot. This should be plain today—plainer than it ever was—because historical fiction, science fiction and fantasy fiction are commonly presented to us on TV, the silver screen, video games and in books. All give us an acceptable period setting for fictional stories. Are we to suppose that people 2000 or even 3000 years ago—only 30 or 40 lifetimes distant—could not write fiction? They could, and many ancient papyri and stelae prove it by exaggerating the exploits of the king who commissioned the work.

## Biblical History

So, we have good reason to question the history of the Jews and the Christians. They will not, so we must. We immediately find our suspicions confirmed, but the walls of the established religions are not so unsteady as those of Jericho. N P Lemche published *Early Israel. Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society Before the Monarchy* in 1985 but attracted little attention. G Garbini in *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel*, New York (1988) attacked theological interpretations of history that countenanced the theologizing historiography of the biblical texts as historical statements.

Garbini is Professor of Semitic Philology in the University of Rome, essentially a philologist and archaeologist with a specific interest in the history of Israel, and is neither Jew nor Christian, but part of the wider circle of ancient historians.

John Bowden

But P R Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel"*, Sheffield (1992) opened up the debate and invited the description "biblical minimalists" and the even less flattering ones. The same year, T L Thompson published a book reaching similar conclusions, *Early History of the Israelite People. From the Written and Archaeological Sources*, Leiden (1992).

Zevit says that though they are "much maligned by Biblicists and historians", minimalists are engaged in a legitimate historical undertaking. All proper historians are trained to require adequate answers to certain questions about any written documents before they decide how they can be used:

- ☐ What is the nature of this document?
- ☐ Who wrote it?
- ☐ Who benefits from this document?
- ☐ When was it written and why?
- ☐ Where was it written?

The Jewish scriptures make up a constitution for the Jewish people to whom they were given. The earliest time that rules like reading the Torah publicly and observing its charges faithfully, abstention from work and commerce on the sabbath, avoiding intermarriage, tithing, maintaining temple sacrifice through a self-imposed tax (*Neh* 10:30-40) could appear is when Ezra and Nehemiah were sent by the Persian king during the fifth century BC to determine civil and religious policy in Yehud.

Textual examination of the books of the scriptures shows that they could not have been written in the times they claim to have been. Moses cannot have written the *Pentateuch* 1500 BC or even 1300 BC; Isaiah could not have written his book in 700 BC.

Moreover, the books are not uniform within themselves and so are not written by a single author, but by different hands at different times. The period intervening between the supposed events and when they were set to paper is explained by historiographers as a period of oral transmission. It never occurs to them that the gap is better explained by the author being a fiction writer.

They use the poems of Homer describing the siege of Troy as a parallel because Homer wrote in 800 BC when the siege of Troy was in 1200 BC. Yet the bulk of Homer's works were romance, even if they were based on recollections of real events. And Troy has been discovered but no trace of an exodus of two million people from Egypt has. Nor has any unequivocal trace of a kingdom of David or an empire of Solomon. We can be certain that the scriptural accounts of these events are fictional and no amount of explaining away by Jewish and Christian believers can alter it.

Garbini had already dated biblical compositions to the Persian and Hellenistic periods, and minimalists conclude that the books of the Jewish bible were written then. The historical books are fictional histories based on earlier legends or less refined fictions, through which the local Persian colonists provided themselves with a mythic past that linked them to the land and to a religion. Zivit points out:

This conclusion has two important corollaries:

1. Bible narratives about the political, social, and intellectual world of ancient Israel from Abraham to the temple's destruction lack probative value.
2. Any narrative about the actual people living in the central mountain areas of Palestine during the Iron Age must be based on archaeological data alone.

No archaeological data or any data external to the bible itself confirm the patriarchal or exodus stories as narrated in *Genesis* and *Exodus*. Only with qualified explanations can archaeological data be drafted to support some elements in the *Joshua-Judges* narratives. If Egyptian slaves escaped in dribs and drabs over a period of 400 years and were joined from time to time by bands of wandering Arab shepherds, then we do not have a biblical exodus! If these runaway slaves and nomads settled in Palestine over a long time span, then we do not have a conquest and we do not have a Joshua! Is that clear? you at the back!

The patriarchal narratives were first told by colonists from Syria who were settled in the Palestinian hills, but the proto-exodus-conquest narratives were written by the colonists to explain the law which they had to obey because it was imposed by the Persians whose enemy was the Egyptians, and to allegorize the century of struggles by the colonists to establish their hegemony over the native Canaanites.

Historical Israel, the actual flesh and blood people who dwelt in the central mountains during the Iron Ages, didn't come from Egypt. They were descendents of earlier, Bronze Age inhabitants of the places where they lived. Their culture and religion was a slightly evolved form of the earlier, Bronze Age Canaanite ones.

All the factual evidence we have is that the culture of the Hill Country of Palestine called Israel and Judah remained Canaanite until the Persians came at the end of the sixth century BC. Only in the following century were books about Jewish history written down. The people of Israel, its leaders and heroes are literary fictions or inventions or constructs. Stories about them, their victories, defeats, religious policies are all late concoctions written at the earliest in the Persian period.

Even when the stories were written down in a book, it was not treated, as it is by simple Christians today, as the unalterable word of God. The history of Israel given in *Chronicles* is not the same as that given

in *Samuel* and *Kings*, just as the gospel of John is not the same as the gospel of Mark. Readers of the bible should realize that it was not written in one sitting. The Persians began it using various older legends and the available annals, the Greeks of the Ptolemies added Hellenistic romances, and the Maccabees added more of them and justified the free state. Some of these early legends and proto-histories were greatly elaborated as Hellenistic romances perhaps in the third and even the second centuries BC.

Contrary to what their detractors believe, minimalists take the historical writings seriously. Some events of the bible are confirmed by external investigation. Some of the kings of Israel and Judah appear in Assyrian records and therefore can be dated. However, given that the history of Israel was only first written in the Persian period, and the Persians had conquered Assyria and Babylonia, and had access to their archives covering hundreds of years, it is more than likely that the scriptural stories of the monarchical period were simply written from the official king lists, inscriptions and diplomatic correspondence of those formerly mighty powers. In short, it is largely historical fiction but set in a realistic historical framework. For those who are Jews and Christians and want to explore history, they should realize this.

Although minimalist claims are derived through reasoning processes practiced by contemporary historians, and constitute a valid and necessary undertaking, they shocked biblical scholarship by their boldness and in their assignment of biblical historiography to the genre of apologetic mythmaking and “big lie” propaganda methods. Davies challenged his readers to decide if they were truly historians or believers masquerading as historians. Did they intend to introduce theological concerns to their analyses?

Is reconstructing “ancient Israel” a historical undertaking or a theological one? If theology is part of the argument, then it can no longer be scholarship, which has to be free of religious commitments to avoid bias. Davies thought belief was more important to biblicist motivation than truth or knowledge. Davies’s statements were considered an attack on the intellectual integrity of those who thought they could hold religious faiths and still be objective scholars. Common sense says that they cannot.

Both Judaism and Christianity are supposed to reject idolatry—the venerating of material objects above God. Yet, to regard the bible as, in any way, infallible is to treat it as a god. The rabbis, indeed, are particular in their monotheism to point out that nothing outside of heaven is perfect, and so the bible (they specify *Torah*) cannot be infallible. The good historian here agrees—the veneration of any earthly writing must be eschewed. Those who cannot had better be honest enough to become theologians instead of pretending to be historians or archaeologists.

The sad thing is that non-religious historians think religiously motivated historians are honest and so leave the religious fieldwork to them. Some religiously motivated historians do deserve praise and much of what we *do* know, they have uncovered, but they have done so like a patient taking the dressing from their own wound—slowly and with a lot of grimacing!

In summary, minimalists exposed the overt influences of theological assumptions in the interpretation of Biblical literature. Their concentration on the importance of the Persian period should lead to more scholarship being concentrated here to rectify the obfuscation and neglect of earlier times.

## **A Proper Approach to Religious History**

What is needed now is for objective historians to take over religious history and place it in its proper context. The bible should be ignored until external evidence shows that something in it is valid. God should be ignored as a cantankerous supernatural personality stirring up the affairs of humanity with His index finger. Anyone with such an absurd and childish belief should be relieved of their academic positions, and the many useless and unproductive departments of theology should be abandoned and their funds transferred to proper history or ancient language departments.

If this were ever done we could hope to make huge strides in the confusion of Near Eastern history, much of which remains quite baffling, despite being recorded for 5000 years, because it is always packed into the biblical jam jar and is never allowed to display its own shape. The Assyrians and particularly their disciples, the Persians will prove to be the founders of the Jewish strand of monotheism, and the history of the Jews will become part of the history of the many small kingdoms set up in the Levant of the Iron Age before the Assyrians and then the Persians absorbed them into empire.

In using old records, chronicles and inscriptions, the historian has to be alert to the fact that that the writer might be writing propaganda. Kings want to glorify themselves not admit their failures, so a battle won might really have been inconclusive and a battle lost might be omitted altogether, and will have to be sought in the records of the victors. Knowing this, biblical historians ought to be aware of the possibility of such tendencies in the scriptures, yet most firmly set themselves against such thoughts, or only accept them grudgingly when they are forced upon them.

What is needed now for progress to be made is a change in paradigm. The scriptural paradigm of Jews and Christians traditionally is that of a gradual revelation of God to His Chosen People through the medium of their history. To state it thus is enough for any proper historian to reject it. The paradigm that should replace it is that of scriptures written by world conquerors intent on pacifying and intimidating their vassals to act as watchers upon a larger and dangerous country subject to the same world power and known to be rebellious. The world power was Persia and the dangerous subject nation was Egypt.

The Christian and Jew will say that the scriptures are the natural place to start to understand Jewish history, but they are the last place to start if bias and pitfalls are to be avoided. Biblical history is largely myth, but the task is to show what is and what is not, within the parameters available, using every technique that is relevant, documentary, archaeological, anthropological, scientific, social and so on. Ideally, the budding historian of the Near East should read what has been discovered about Near Eastern history from other sources first. Since this is probably impossible for anyone brought up in our culture, they should begin by firmly believing that all of the bible is myth and forgetting it while they get a historical picture first. Only then should they turn to the scriptures to try to understand who, writing hundreds of years later would want to invent a bogus history for the Jews.

Doubtless, it seems old hat to postmodernists, but how can pure subjectivity do better? If “deconstruction” is interpreted as “textual criticism”, in which evidences of the author’s prejudices are adduced then that is fine—it is constructive despite its name. But, if the rhetoric of postmodernism is to be believed, it replaces enquiry after truth with fiction writing, and all scholarship might as well cease.

While Dever has some valid points about the extremes of postmodernism, he walks right into the trap of supporting the postmodern contention that so-called “objective” scholarship is far from objective but is meant to support the status quo and the establishment. Furthermore, he ends up being the one who defends fiction against truth.

Biblical scholarship is largely a sham and should be mercilessly criticized, deconstructed or whatever, but with the objective of replacing it with proper scholarship. The opposite viewpoint ends up with giving prizes to the worthless rubbish that biblicists keep churning out—despite themselves, the epitome of postmodernism. It is all make-belief. Honest checking of the biblical stories against other criteria so far shows that biblical history is, to say the least, improbable. The “deconstruction” of biblical history presented in these pages is to stimulate the reconstruction of a better one, and that is initiated too. There is no doubt that it will be thoroughly disliked by Jews, Christians and Moslems alike because it shows that their religions began in a country they all hate, a country whose history has been ignored—Iran!

Others are not interested either in the trendy faddishness of postmodern subjective meanderings, or the aim of supporting present political set-ups, but are interested in truth, or the closest they can get to it, when much of the data are lost or deliberately destroyed. The Israelis have control of Palestine *de facto*. If they feel they need a myth to justify it, that is up to them, but their psycho-sociological need for it should have no bearing on any scientist trying to determine the true facts of history. If the leaning of the data we have is that ancient Israelite history is mythical then to defend the Israelis is no reason to deny it.

Dever does not like the criticisms of the traditionalists but they are quite justified. After one hundred years, Dever says we must still wait for some “mass of complex data” that will revolutionize the history of Israel. The critics of the truth of the Jewish scriptures as history are tired of hearing this, and are tired of hearing so-called archaeological experts lie through their eye teeth about what the archaeological record says.

The trouble is that most of these people have a vested interest in their belief, not in truth. When a few renegades suggest that a belief that depends upon lies should be questioned, they get enraged. It is not just Judaism or Christianity that they see as threatened but, as Dever says, the “Western cultural tradition”. It is a poor tradition that has to be upheld by lies, and it is a poor god that requires his believers to lie for him.

## **Wellhausenians**

P R S Mooney says (*A Century of biblical Archaeology*) that “it was no longer possible [as early as 1890] to accept without question that the original religion and society of the peoples of ancient Israel had necessarily been different in kind from their neighbours”. Yet more than a full century later, not only are people who want to be ignorant taught it in churches, children who are supposed to be being educated are taught it in our schools. Is it right that Christians should oblige us to be taught what *is* not, or even what *might* not, be true? Julius Wellhausen’s *Prolegomena*, over ten years before that, had dated the *Pentateuch* and *Joshua* to the Persian period. Solomon Schechter, the discoverer in a Cairo geniza of the *Damascus Document*, called Wellhausen anti-Semitic.

What Christians cannot fight they ignore. R J Coggins and J L Houlden can edit a book that purports to be a dictionary of biblical interpretation without even having an entry on Julius Wellhausen, rightly described by Joel



Sweek as “the most important biblical critic since the Reformation”. Christians are aware that sins of omission are more effective—because less easily noticed—than sins of commission, though they use both to fool their ignorant flocks.

Nineteenth century archaeology might have been relatively amateurish and even incidentally destructive, but it was mainly non-sectarian and non-apologetic, and therefore honest. The archaeology that arose in the twentieth century under W F Albright and his school was much more destructive because it was sectarian and apologetic and so would not entertain contrary evidence. It was “biblical archaeology”. W G Dever wrote that W F Albright’s “overarching goal was to undo the critical, liberal re-writing of Israel’s history, ie, to rewrite Wellhausenism”, while J M Sasson said that “Albright never exerted himself to understand” Wellhausen, confirming that this highly cited Christian archaeologist was no professional at anything except being a Christian.

For over half a century, the gadding about Palestine of W F Albright and his school was counter-productive for many outside of America. European scholars saw it as ruled by a theological motivation and an apologetic purpose which was to defend the authenticity of the bible through its fundamental historicity. The contempt for archaeology the Albrightians generated led to its neglect and almost to its rejection by many European scholars. It shows that some students of the bible are interested in integrity and truth, but they are a rare breed among Christians.

Gosta Ahlström was a European scholar who became an American one through spending half his working life in the USA. He had no regard for the Albright school of mendacity. Biblical research could not be divorced from any other sort of historical research. Theological preconceptions and biases should be set aside along with any other bias not based on evidence, and nor were enquirers scholars unless they were willing to be led wherever the evidence led. He disdained those who played to their peers in the gallery to prove their academic purity without any commitment to historical fidelity. He said that they were not just wrong, they were immoral. Of course, most Christians say, “Not me!”

Ahlström did not want to accept an idea just because it was popular, but only when it had been satisfactorily demonstrated. Christian apologists remain fond of influencing young minds with expressions like “most scholars believe” but Ahlström would tell his students that the weight of scholarly opinion counted for little, if they were all wrong! From the bible alone Ahlström by 1963 had decided that the perpetual monotheism of Yehouah was a myth. It was clear to him that the god had begun in a polytheistic setting.

It was also clear to Ahlström, according to Carl D Evans, a professor at the University of South Carolina, that he saw religion was an instrument of royal policy and administration in the ancient near east, a hugely important observation just because it defies orthodoxy, and explains so much. And yet in his posthumous history of ancient Palestine, he shows how hard it is for biblical scholars to purge their minds of the prejudices they were brought up with. The earlier chapters are commendably objective, but he later falls into the trap of accepting and paraphrasing uncritically the Deuteronomistic history.

In 1921, Friedrich Delitzsch made out the Wellhausenian case afresh, refuting the empty apologetics that had filled books and journals since Wellhausen. Again it made no difference and churches continued to teach their myths as history. What is less forgivable is that newspaper writers and academics did the same. A recent case reported that medics had diagnosed Herod’s mortal illness from his reported symptoms. It is a nice exercise for

doctors, no doubt, and nothing wrong with that. Herod had to die of something whether the doctors are right in their diagnosis or not. But the reporter added to his report the so-called massacre of the innocents as if it were history! This reporter (Mark Henderson, UK *Daily Telegraph*) is a science reporter too! It is time that people of all walks of life stopped pandering to Christian mendacity, especially scientists and historians.

Even though the biblicists came to accept that the oldest date for the earliest parts of the bible to be written was the ninth century—as much as a millennium after Abraham—they claimed these stories had been passed down by a historically reliable oral tradition! Yet the evidence we have in any depth on oral transmission, from the middle ages, does not confirm that it is historically reliable. It might nevertheless be possible to argue that there is some reliable history in these traditions, but how is anyone to know what it is? Without independent confirmation it is impossible to know. What Christians mean, when they claim there is some historical truth in these ancient tales, is that they are essentially historically true, quite a different argument, but the one that they want Christian tyros to believe. They are essentially mythology, and any history in them cannot be decided upon, so they are useless as historical documents and should be discarded.

Biblicists, under pressure from genuine historical scholars sought to classify portions of the bible as secondary. Having done this, what was left was primary, and what was secondary was not authentic. What was primary was authentic. Naturally what was primary and authentic was declared historical and turned out to be the core history of Israel!

Delitzsch saw it as the propaganda that it was, and he too was often denounced as anti-Semitic for trying to distinguish truth from lies, and Christians even called him anti-Christian. Anyone who brings forward evidence that the Jewish and Christian bibles are mythical stands the risk of getting such treatment. Those who know nothing about truth and try their utmost to hide it will never hear truth as a defence. To attack falsehood is to them to propagate hatred, yet they are often the people who hate, and not their critics. It is another right that religious people want to preserve for themselves while hiding behind a bland veil of love.

An extreme but obvious lie that Christians propagate and like to believe is that they stand in a minority as the defenders of god and His truth in the world against the critical scholars, who plainly then are in a huge majority! B S Childs (*Introduction to the Old Testament in Scripture*) says critical scholars are a “hegemony”. He means a dominating force. Albright thought he was standing against the massed disciples of Wellhausen, apparently a recently coined name for Satan. The clappies like to feel they are struggling like the victims of Nero against a cruel world, when the only cruelty they suffer is the indulgence of their parents and their overweening selves. These though are not sheep but pretend to be scholars. When scholarship is not concerned with truth it is not scholarship, and to claim God’s Truth, is to admit to being a liar.

The opposite of a critical dominance is the truth. The critics cannot get any broadcast time or print space to air their views and can only get published in academic tomes. Every newspaper has its devotional columns, extremely rarely given over to a non-Christian view and very rarely indeed any view critical of the Christian tub of hogwash. This medium, the internet, is overwhelmed with Christian pap while having little that is critical. There has even been recent talk by the UK government, run by a frustrated vicar, as the country’s foremost satirical journal knows, of extending the blasphemy laws. More than a hundred years of critical scholarship has penetrated to the minds of ministers to the extent that they must stop their parishioners from hearing about it, and if by accident they do, dismiss it as cranks or devil worshippers. The whole of critical scholarship has not



impinged in the least on the way that clerics address their congregations or the way they teach their Sunday schools. What is this if it is not dishonesty and contempt for discovery?

Views contrary to the believers' are not argued against but are declaimed as contrary to faith:

Views like those of Noth attack the very heart and core of the biblical proclamation.

Reaction against such extreme criticism is the only possible approach for those committed to the truth of the bible.

Opponents are extreme and are not even allowed to be sincere Christians, committed to the truth of the bible. They are in error, and "error must be combatted!" We know how Christians have combatted what they call error in the past. What do they propose to do today?

T L Thompson observes upon the circularity of the reasoning of the biblicists who "derive context from text" and interpret "that text in terms of its wholly dependent context". This utterly unscientific nonsense is the lifeblood of biblical scholarship. G E Mendenhall writes that the apologists have destroyed any pretence that biblical studies is scientific:

If the ability to command general assent among those who are competent be the criterion of the scientific, it must now be admitted that a science of biblical studies does not exist.

The real point about scientists is that they must bow to the weight of realistic evidence. That is what committed Christians cannot do, and why they are unscientific. What is worse is that they pretend to be scientific for the sake of their sheep. Though they ignore the evidence countering the Christian myth, they effect a pseudo-scientific purity for the benefit of their converts. It can be nothing other than hypocrisy when Christianity brags that the central requirement of salvation is persistence of belief whatever evidence is brought against it.

Defenders of the scriptures are beginning to accept that they are not history and seeking to present them as something less than historical, without actually admitting they are myths. Two recent editions of popular text books frequently accept the bible as less than historical. *Understanding the Old Testament (UOT)* and *Old Testament Survey*, according to Ron Vince in a review, defend the bible by denying its historicity. Repeatedly they say of a biblical passage that it "is not history as defined by modern historians", or it "is not history in the modern sense". History in the "modern sense" is "a purely objective practice", or "a detached report of events". The exodus story, writes Anderson (*UOT*), "does not pretend to be objective history".

The historicity of the bible is a religious premise. Expressions such as "Faith affirms that blah blah was superintended by the same Spirit of God that prompted blah blah", are quite impossible to contradict without being insulting. To do so is to challenge the religious beliefs of the utterer, not to challenge any evidence. That is why these pages are quite uncompromising. Compromise leaves the pious Jews and Christians unchallenged and so continuing in the delusion that their position is unchallengeable.

Minimalism points to serious questions concerning the nature of the biblical text and its relationship to religious faith, such as what is meant by the truth of the bible. In what sense is it true when it is not historically true? Is the theological truth that God revealed himself in the bible dependent upon it being historical truth, or is a

different method of expression truth? Are scholarly evidence and argument to be readily accepted when they support the historicity of the bible, but to be rejected when they point to it being allegorical or mythical? Christians have an obligation to use their mind because *Matthew* (*Mt* 22:37) has Jesus adding “mind” to the commandment to love God with heart and soul (*Dt* 10:6; 30:6). One assumes he did not mean use your mind, but ignore whatever it discovers, and combat error in those who do not ignore it!

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 1. The Crisis of Sacred History**  
**Iron Age to Persian Conquest**

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To judge a story's historicity by its degree of realism is to mistake verisimilitude for historicity. Verisimilitude is the literary term for the illusion of reality. Just because a story sounds real does not mean that it is. Realistic fiction is just as fictional as nonrealistic fiction.

Adele Berlin, *J Biblical Literature* (2001)

### **The Walls of Jericho**

For centuries "scholars" have been satisfied with any whisker of evidence that might have been interpreted as upholding biblical history and have hung on to it contrary to all reason, until recently when the continual absence even of whiskers of evidence where it ought to be plentiful has forced some to admit the scriptures are historically a massive lie. Though the *Old Testament* contains much of value mythologically and in terms of wisdom, it is mainly lost on Christians who prefer the fancy of a supernatural, interventionist god that never existed until the Persian kings of the fifth century invented it to control the people of Palestine they needed as loyal subjects to guard the gates of Egypt. Jewish nationalists in the second century BC found the stories valuable in giving a basis for their new state, and to warn Jews off Greek gods and culture.

Thomas L Thompson, Professor of Old Testament Studies at the University of Copenhagen, writes (TLT-BIH):

The association of the bible with religious faith has often been understood by biblical scholars to give warrant to the emptiest of propositions.

A reviewer of Thompson's book, William Dalrymple, says the same thing even more delicately:

Thompson is right to emphasize that traditional biblical scholars are guilty of giving a religious text a factual historicity it neither seeks nor deserves.

Put less delicately Thompson and his reviewer are saying traditional biblical scholars are liars. An empty proposition put forward with the intention of confusing or detracting is simply a lie, and so is a text given a factual historicity it does not deserve.

Christian acceptance of the reality of Jewish history has followed a path similar to the "god of the gaps" in science. As science advanced, there were fewer gaps left for god to occupy by way of explanation. In Jewish history, latterly we have seen a sort of king Canute god—he had to keep stepping back as the tide came in. Palaeological science refuted creation and the origins myths. The Flood of Noah had to be discarded as historical truth. Moses had to be discarded. Joshua became a myth. Judges never existed. One by one the biblical stories had to be accepted as false as the tide of knowledge rolled in. Each time the servants of the god, Canute, scratched a new line in the sand, but the tide washed it away. Saul and David, mythical. Solomon, pure fancy. The divided kingdom, invention. The lost tribes of Israel, plain nonsense. Finally, the exile from Judah

and the return, not quite what they seem!

The delay in realising these things is not surprising. The *Palestine Exploration Society*, founded in 1870, set its purpose as the “refutation of unbelief...” by “modern skepticism” attacking the facts of the bible. The high point of biblical archaeology was from 1920 to 1970, when the American School, under William F Albright made a total pig’s ear out of Palestinian archaeology in defence of God’s word!

James Kelso excavated Bethel, mixing artefacts, facts and fancy. He mixed up unrelated artefacts from different stratigraphic layers to discover “Abraham’s altar” and “an open air sacrificial shrine to the Canaanite god El”. No wonder these people call the archaeology of Palestine “disturbed”. Rabbi Nelson Glueck, a follower of Albright, saw a decline in population in Transjordan in the third millennium BC as reflecting the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet, it was a widespread phenomenon. Modern archaeologists have to try to correct the mess biblical archaeologists have made, and the faulty interpretations they have given. Neither ministers nor media take much notice of their efforts in the social conspiracy to maintain religion.

Albright’s disciple, George Wright, openly averred that Biblical archaeology was for apologetical purposes:

The Biblical archaeologist may or may not be an excavator himself, but he studies the discoveries of the excavations in order to glean from them every fact that throws a direct, indirect or even diffused light upon the Bible... Yet his chief concern is not with methods or pots or weapons in themselves alone. His central and absorbing interest is the understanding and exposition of the Scriptures.

Only now, after a hundred years or more of excavating Palestine, are scholars beginning to think that not all might be right with scriptural history. Many have realized that Biblical archaeology is discredited. Wright himself was obliged to retract many of his claims.

No trace of the long sagas of the *Old Testament* has ever been found in any archaeological dig from Jericho to Megiddo. The bible tells us of Joshua invading the western banks of the Jordan from the east bank, attacking Jericho and dramatically succeeding in defeating the walled city when god arranged a miracle to bring down the walls. A fortified city that fell in a definite moment of history is an archaeological prize indeed. Biblical archaeologists, Christians and Jews, dug and dug. Soon the traces of the mighty walls destroyed in the biblical account would be found. And they dug some more. Ancient walls were found thousands of years before they should have been. They have found no Iron Age walls. There *were* no walls from the Middle Bronze age on! In 1907, E Sellin and C Watzinger, German archaeologists, dug earnestly at the site, identifying three layers, attributed to the Canaanite, the Israelite and the Judaeon periods. The “Israelite” city which had a tremendous wall and a palace came to an end in a violent destruction. Curiously, many scarabs of the Middle Kingdom were found, as well as pot handles impressed with seals of the same time in the Israelite layer! “They must have been used as amulets hundreds of years after they were made!” Years later, Watzinger demurred, dating the “Israelite layer”, from the scarabs, to the Middle Kingdom. The “Judaeon” city was assigned to the ninth century, as the work of the biblical Hiel.

John Garstang undertook new excavations at Jericho between the wars. He saw traces of intense fire. “Houses alongside the wall are found burned to the ground, their roofs have fallen upon the domestic pottery within”. “Palace storerooms were burnt in a general conflagration”. “White ash was overlaid by a thick layer of charcoal

and burnt debris".

Kathleen Kenyon turned to the site in 1955 with a new type of systematic archaeology, the Wheeler-Kenyon method, she helped to perfect. Kenyon found that, in the time of the Middle Kingdom, Jericho was at its apogee as a city and fortress: "...the Middle Bronze Age is perhaps the most prosperous in the whole history of Palestine". The walls consisted of a massive bank faced with stone, "part of a complex system" of defences, but the city was set on fire, then "violently destroyed and left in ruins". The thick layer of burnt material above the Middle Bronze Age buildings is the highest surviving layer, showing that the city had ceased to exist before Joshua's invasion.

Of any fortifications that the Late Bronze Age settlement might have had, no trace survives. The double line of wall, thought by Garstang to be of the Late Bronze age, or New Kingdom in Egypt, dated from the Early Bronze, contemporary with the Old Kingdom in Egypt. Garstang's conclusion of a sizable fortress in the days of Amenhotep III was shown to be wrong. He had excavated the wrong wall, thinking the Early Bronze Age foundations were the Late Bronze Age walls of the time of the conquest.

The site was only a village in the Late Bronze Age when Joshua supposedly crossed the Jordan River. The conquest must have been easier than the bible suggested! French archaeologist Judith Marquet-Krause nearby excavated the site of Ai (*Josh 7-8*) and found it was also destroyed around 2400 BC and abandoned at the time of Joshua's conquest.

It is a sad fact that of the town walls of the Late Bronze Age, within which period the attack by the Israelites must fall by any dating, not a trace remains... As concerns the date of the destruction of Jericho by the Israelites, all that can be said is that the latest Bronze Age occupation should, in my view, be dated to the third quarter of the fourteenth century BC... a date which suits neither the school of scholars which would date the entry of the Israelites into Palestine to c 1400 BC. nor the school which prefers a date of c 1260 BC...

At just that stage when archaeology should have linked with the written record, archaeology fails us. This is regrettable. There is no question of the archaeology being needed to prove that the Bible is true but it is needed as a help in interpretation to those older parts of the *Old Testament* which from the nature of their sources... cannot be read as a straight-forward record.

Kathleen Kenyon *Digging up Jericho*

Kenyon was not led by either hypothesis of the Exodus, neither Garstang's who placed the Exodus in the days of Amenhotep II and the conquest in the days of Amenhotep III of the eighteenth dynasty (Apiru theory), nor Albright's that the Exodus took place in the days of Rameses II and the conquest in the days of Merneptah (Israel Stele), both of the nineteenth dynasty. Nevertheless, under either hypothesis, she expected to find the *Old Testament* confirmed and the great walls of Jericho dating from some time in the Late Bronze Age, to which both the eighteenth and the nineteenth dynasties belonged. She intended to discover the truthfulness of the written record, and seemed sad she did not. Professor Martin Noth pointed to the Jericho discrepancy as decisive proof of the unreliability of the *Old Testament*.

The bible believers use their ingenuity to explain why the bible says there were Iron Age walls and practical

science says the opposite—Jericho in those days must have been a different Jericho! The plain fact is that Jericho had no walls after the Middle Bronze Age and the biblical story is mythology, less historically accurate than Homer's Iliad, which no one believed as history but which was vindicated when Troy was actually found a hundred years ago.

No trace has been found of any conquest of the west bank in the late Bronze or early Iron Ages. Some scholars, accepting this some time ago, decided that the "conquest" must have been a slow infiltration over a few centuries, followed by an internal rebellion against the ruling classes. The trouble is that there is no evidence of that either. Such a change would show up culturally. It does not. And there is no good reason to believe the biblical accounts of the conquest except that they are in God's book!

Numbers 13 describes Canaan as being full of giants. Of course the bible bashers tell us this is merely metaphorical. Why then is this to be accepted as metaphorical but, say, the miracles of Jesus are to be read as true history? It is to avoid such problematic questions that Fundamentalists prefer to believe the literal truth of the bible, but it is a position that is untenable to any reasonable person. The correct position is that it is all metaphorical. The scriptures are a long allegory.

## **Israel**

What appears to be the word Israel has been found on one Bronze Age monument (thirteenth century BC) depicting people that the Pharaoh Merenptah fought against in the Levant. Does it mean the people of the bible? The same inscription states that the "seed of Israel" are no more, implying that they had been wiped out. Monument builders are noted braggers, so we do not have to believe this, but there can hardly have been the vast numbers of them mentioned in Exodus. The Israel of this inscription is also described as the "spouse" of Canaan. The Egyptians seem to be depicting Israel and Canaan as the parent gods of the people they had conquered and eliminated.

The Philistines, on the other hand, are well documented. They were sea people from the Aegean who invaded the Nile Delta and the coasts of the southern Levant in the late Bronze Age. The Egyptians record this on their monuments and call them the Peleset, from which name Palestine is derived. The ancient name is found also in Assyrian records and was adopted by the Greeks and Romans.

Not only did the Hebrews and the Israelites scarcely exist as separate peoples but the Canaanites were also not any particular ethnic group. The term simply refers to the people living in the Levant at these times but it seems they were not a nation. The Canaanites had no defined homeland but seemed to live anywhere in the lands of coastal Syria and Phoenicia and the hinterland hill country later known as Israel and Judah but not Philistia. Nor were biblical Canaanites a nation, but a generic people who did not worship a monotheistic Yehouah but worshipped Baal. Since Baal simply means "Lord", it is hard to be certain that even any particular god, Baal, is meant. It was loosely used for any god in the Canaanite pantheon, including Yehouah. Anyway, the Canaanites and the Philistines between them represented the world of idolatrous people at the time the mythical state of Israel was first described.

*Deuteronomy 32:7-9* says plainly that, for the Israelites, Yehouah was appointed the god of Jacob. He was therefore a national god and other nations had their own national gods different from Yehouah but equal to him.

Whoever appoints gods must be an even greater god and this was El Elyon, the Most High God, who was obviously the universal god, not Yehouah! Because Yehouah is merely an angel or a son of the Most High in *Deuteronomy* shows that he could not have created the world at the beginning of *Genesis* as all Jews and Christians doggedly believe. El was the original creator and the authors of the compilation of mythological fragments called the scriptures elevated Yehouah to the role to suit Jewish aspirations.

In *Genesis* 10 is a similar story to *Deuteronomy* 32:7-9 in which the Patriarchs are allotted to parts of the world and the nations and cities of those parts. Comparing the two versions suggests that the Patriarch's were themselves the lesser gods appointed by the Most High, or the earthly equivalents of the heavenly gods appointed to the same regions. Yehouah was the heavenly Jacob.

*Genesis* goes on to try to explain, by aetiological myths, the name Israel and others. Israel in the popular aetiology of the time meant "struggled with El" and the place of the struggle was "Peniel" because in his struggle Jacob saw the "face of God". Simple Christians write to express their amazement at all this and to say it proves that God is behind the scriptures! They are mythological rationalisations of age old place names but, at the same time undermine the whole basis of modern Judaism, Islam and Christianity as strictly monotheistic religions. Who could "struggle" with the Most High god except another god?

The Jewish scriptures are chock-a-block with puns on names and aetiological mythology by way of explanation. The Essenes had a child-like delight in punning and the question arises whether they had it from the scriptures or whether the scriptures had it from the Essenes. Since Aramaic was not a rich language and vowels were fluid, the chances for punning were great. They read the scriptures as word play, but had their predecessors written it as word play? Jacob, who became Israel, is a good example. Jacob means "deceive", "supplant" or "grasp" and puns on the word for heel, and we find all of these implications in the stories of Jacob and Esau. Essenes looked for them in their peshirim and created them in their everyday speech. It was like the original Cockney rhyming slang—only those brought up to it could comprehend it. Jesus did it, which is why he was said to have spoken in parables, or riddles.

## **The Bronze and Iron Ages**

When archaeology revealed no confirmation of a Mosaic monotheism in Iron Age Jordan or Israel, scholars and clergy alike became speechless with shock. They told nobody—certainly not the Christian punters whose accumulated pennies pay for their sinecures. They turned to the trusty old weapon of Christianity—the lie. They either blatantly denied the evidence or put a false spin on it.

The gods of Palestine in the Iron Age were local gods. In the south, they were influenced by Egypt, and Seth and the goddess, Hathor, were popular. Phoenicia had a general influence as a long established Semitic trading nation, and it shows in images and hymns. The Arab kingdoms to the south also had an influence. Indeed the religions of Israel and Judah were essentially the same as those of Moab, Ammon and Edom. Each had their god, but their general characteristics were similar and some even had the same named god as others, though differing in small ways. The Assyrians, for reasons of political unity, were keen on syncretism and promoted a more universal idea of god, whose sons were the local gods.

The universal god was called the "Lord of Heaven" or "Lord" for short. The dialect word for "Lord" was Baal—a



woman's husband was her "Baal" as we see in the *Book of Hosea*. The court of the Lord of Heaven were his sons, the local deities, who were therefore a great assembly of national gods. This syncretism seemed to work in different ways in different Assyrian provinces. A Great God superseded the local gods but often he was the son elevated to his father's old throne. The son usurped the power of the universal god and became a God of Heaven with universal and local characteristics.

In the Bronze Age, the chief god had been El, the creator god, and his consort was the queen of heaven, Asherah or Astarte. El was a distant god, though worshipped for some of his aspects. Nearer and more approachable was Baal who was also associated with Astarte or Asherah, the mother of all living things. Asherah—as mothers are—was always approachable.

Baal was a son of god, the local god of the small states and had a variety of local names besides his generic name, Baal. Baal is found in Phoenicia, Galilee, Israel and Judah, as well as further north in the Levant. Yehouah is found in Israel, Judah, and Edom. Dagon is found in Philistia; Qaus in Edom, Moloch and Chemosh in Moab and Ammon, Amon and Hathor in Shephalah. El was the authority behind Baal and Baal was the authority behind the local king. The local Baal and his servant, the king, were the ways that people had an identity, and that meant that they considered their own god as unique even though they were in the same litter as the others. Their characteristics and worship differed in only minor ways but the priests of each—as they do—were keen to establish the differences.

Goddesses were worshipped in the special roles of fertility, caring, healing and—oddly—warfare. The most important figurine found in Palestine is of a naked woman, presumed to be a goddess rather than graffiti, though they are often crudely fashioned. From their roughness, these were household fertility objects rather than temple statuettes. The putative loyalty to a single temple in Jerusalem is also mythical. Archaeology and the scriptures show there were many shrines in Israel and even in Jerusalem, often called "high places", and there were hosts of priests, priestesses, choirists, servants and so on, of both sexes. The fertility rituals they celebrated involved both sexes, but later editors have suppressed the details in the biblical fragments, though the bible does admit the Jews had temples for the gods of the Moabites, the Ammonites and several Phoenician deities at Jerusalem, including a shrine to Moloch in the Vale of Hinnom where human sacrifices were "passed through the fire".

In the fourteenth century BC, Yehouah is mentioned in Egypt. Egyptian New Kingdom texts refer to people dwelling in the desert near Edom as the "Shasu of Yehouah". where "Yehouah" seems to be a place name. Christian "scholars" jumped to the conclusion that the place must have been near Sinai where the Theophany of Yehouah came to Moses and the place must properly have been called "Beth Yehouah", the House of Yehouah.

Elements in personal names, including royal names, from the early Bronze Age city of Ebla and the late Bronze Age city of Ugarit, suggest a god with the name Yeho, but they could be a form of diminutive. Both could be related if Yeho was meant to signify a little El. Iron age altars apparently dedicated to Yehouah or an equivalent god have been uncovered at Arad and Beersheba. Yehouah is mentioned at Nebo, and is associated with Samaria and Teman. Yehouah is declared the god of Samaria (Israel) and his consort is Asherah.

In the first millennium BC, reference to Yehouah was widespread in the whole of the Levant from Sinai to Syria. Texts from the Persian period mention Baal and link Yehouah with Asherah and a letter from Elephantine in



Egypt refers to him. Surprisingly, for a hidden, faceless and ineffable god, coins of the Persian period were minted with the image of Yehouah and his symbols. A god, Yeho, was worshipped in the eastern Mediterranean at least until the end of the Hellenistic period. Philo of Biblos, for example, refers to a god, Yao. Even Eusebius writes of a god, leuw, worshipped in north Syria. Temples to Yehouah are known to have existed at Araq-el-Amir, Cyrenaica, Leontopolis, Elephantine, Arad and Samaria on Mount Gerizim besides the Jerusalem temple. How do we get from this traditional fertility religion of gods and goddesses to the ethical monotheism of the Jewish scriptures? Some, such as Norman Gottwald, call the religion of the Jews a “mutation”, implying that it was a most peculiar and spontaneous change. They seem to mean a miracle, the preferred view of most Christian and Jewish punters, who see God’s finger forever wagging in sacred history.

G E Wright, a devout Albrightian, got surprisingly close to revealing the truth when he spoke ( *The Old Testament against its Environment* ) of the Jewish religion being impossible to have evolved by “any natural evolutionary process from the Pagan world”. Wright also says:

It is impossible to see how this God of Israel could have evolved slowly from polytheism. The two faiths rest on entirely different foundations. The religion of Israel suddenly appears in history...

He wants to give the impression that the divine finger must have been pushing it in the right direction, or rather that God suddenly revealed it! Yet the obvious alternative to evolution is not divine intervention but human intervention. What religion already had the necessary attributes, but could not have evolved naturally from Canaanite polytheism? It is Persian Zoroastrianism! Wright cannot see the implications of his own words even when he gives a good analogy of what must have happened in Palestine in the Persian period.

We in the USA have our founding fathers, our exodus from European oppression, our covenant in the constitution and the Bill of Rights, our conquest of America, and a succession of great men...

He refers to the sagas of Moses and Joshuah and concludes that the biblical events are not unique. The proper comparison is with the “returners from exile”, the colonists sent by the Persian kings. The singular difference is that the founding fathers of the USA were independently leaving oppression in their home countries to start a freer life in the colonies, whereas the Jews in the fifth century BC were being sent as colonists by oppressors who had declared themselves saviours of the colonies and restorers of their gods. In either case, the covenant was a legal document. The American wrote their own as freemen but the Jewish leaders had to accept the Persian treaty, as servants of the king of kings, the regent of Yehouah on earth.

## **The Divine Crisis Revisited**

John R Bartlett says in *Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation*, according to a Bryn Mawr classical review by Thomas Bolin of S Mary’s University, San Antonio, that archaeology cannot “prove” the bible, then claims to stand on the middle-ground of the equal use of the bible and archaeology for a “reconstruction of biblical history”. Yet like many other biblical scholars, in practice, he limits archaeology to the ancillary role of supporting the biblical texts. Subordination of archaeological material to the biblical is the same circular argumentation used for decades by W F Albright and his students to affirm the historicity of biblical events (Thomas L Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, 1974 ). Are these people being deliberately dishonest or are they kidding themselves?

To contrast objective, archaeological data with ideologically biased ancient literature is specious in that putatively objective archaeological data are themselves interpreted by the modern archaeologist, mainly biased toward the revealed story, before they reach the public. Sean V Freyne, who should be among those who know, acknowledges the bias of interpreters of archaeological data. Bartlett primes us in advance that archaeology cannot challenge the bible's historical truth:

Archaeological research may once have found the tomb of Jesus and may yet find the grave of Moses, but such discoveries will not demonstrate the uniqueness of Yehouah or the resurrection of Jesus.

Or otherwise, so traditionalists can sigh in relief. Yet, though archaeology cannot absolutely verify the history or theology of the bible, it can challenge its versions of history and theology and demand their revision in the light of its discoveries. If archaeologists had found and confirmed the tomb of Jesus with first-century skeletal remains in it, wouldn't there be cause to examine the biblical texts for accuracy?

Or, if archaeology showed that the degree of state activity required by the bible for the nations of David and Solomon is not present in tenth century BC Palestine, and it *has* shown it, doesn't it suggest that the biblical stories of David and Solomon might be verging on gross exaggeration. Archaeology would then have said something about the resurrection of Jesus or about Yehouah's promise to David of an everlasting covenant.

Thomas Bolin reminds us that William Dever's interest, the settlement of the Israelites in Palestine, is an issue that has exercised scholars and archaeologists for almost a century. In his pursuit of his investigation, Dever has rejected the external conquest described in *Joshua* and *Judges* and taken as historical by Albright. Instead, Dever cites the work of Volkmar Fritz stressing the cultural and material continuity that existed in Palestine throughout the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. Drawing upon the surface surveys of I Finkelstein (*The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* 1988 ), Dever argues that the Israelites or, for him, "proto-Israelites", are first attested in the archaeological record in Late Bronze-Early Iron Age settlements in the central Judean highlands and are characterized by, among lesser things:

1. small, unwallled villages consisting of clusters of houses lacking any large monumental architecture;
2. technological traits such as plaster-lined cisterns, iron tools, and terrace farming;
3. a supposedly distinctive four-room houseplan;
4. ceramic continuity with the Late Bronze lowland culture.

For Dever, this "archaeological assemblage" is the signature of the proto-Israelites and confirm the description in the books of *Joshua* and *Judges* of emerging Israelite society as impoverished, agrarian, family and clan based, and egalitarian.

Now, in the absence of epigraphic remains, grand architecture, art or ceramics, it is impossible to determine the ethnicity of a site's former inhabitants. Nevertheless, Dever claims to do this when he ascribes to the Israelites "a new ethnic consciousness that we must presume" from the archaeological data, even though the list he gives has nothing clearly to do with ethnicity but rather with technological advancement.

The simplicity of these villages in architecture and layout leaves little room for finding in their technology anything

sufficiently distinctive of culture. The one feature of these hill country villages that could distinguish ethnicity—ceramics—shows that the Israelites were culturally continuous with their Bronze Age lowland neighbours—Canaanites not Israelites. Why then does Dever insist that these sites are Israelite? Because the bible tells us they were. The argument is circular. The scholars find archaeological data from these sites but they do not read them in their cultural and geographical context. Instead they read them in the context that they came to verify, that of the biblical books of *Joshua* and *Judges*. Lo! They find that it verifies it! The archaeology is subordinate to the bible.

In his interpretation of biblical texts, Dever uses the sociological analysis of Norman Gottwald, despite seeming to dislike Gottwald's idea that the ancient Israelites were Canaanite peasants who revolted against the rulers of the city-states. Thus, he thinks that early Israelite culture is typified "probably... by radical, reformist ideology". They were rebels.

Brolin tells us that Gottwald's typically sanctimonious interpretation—that the nascent Israelites were egalitarian, because of their revealed religious sentiments, whereas the Canaanite city-states were oppressive—has been witheringly criticized in the last twenty years, for its naïve understanding of the biblical texts and the application of social theory to ancient culture. The use of Gottwald's shaky idea to identify his proto-Israelite ethnic markers, further weakens Dever's shaky case.

Dever was adamant, in an article in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, 1985, that the archaeology of Palestine should be a discipline distinct from biblical studies. Yet, elsewhere, in *Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation*, he makes leading statements like, the biblical authors "claimed to be inspired by God", and "much about ancient Israel still remains a mystery, if not a miracle".

The aim of statements like these can hardly be the skeptical stance expected of a scientist. Scientists have long since discredited such intimations of biblical superiority and the uniqueness of its religious outlook compared with neighbouring cultures. While traditional scholars emphasize the uniqueness of the Israelites, modern ones see in them striking similarities with the general culture of the Levant and Mesopotamia.

Until the twentieth century, scholars could probably have found differences between neighbouring Welsh or Lancashire valleys that, presented alone, would have made them look like different cultures. In reality, the common factors omitted show them to be Welsh or Lancastrian. The same is true of Israel. "Biblical scholars" went forth to seek the evidence that made Israel unique as God's Chosen People. A more balanced view suggests overwhelmingly that the features of Canaanite religion were shared with the Israelites.

One problem for the discredited conquest and immigration theories of Israel's origins, became a strength from Israel Finkelstein's work. Hebrew as an indigenous language in Palestine could be linked to a settlement history that also had its origins in Palestine. Beginning in the weaknesses of Late Bronze Age patronates, Thomas L Thompson explains that the new settlement of Iron I saw the population shift from an urban economy to a network of small farmers and pastoralists in at least three geographically distinct regions in highland Palestine associated with biblical Israel.

1. The Galilee—with its own distinctive storage jars and olive presses—seems to have been closely linked with Phœnicia, agreeing with Axel Knauf's linguistic geography for the Assyrian period which ties

inscriptions from as far south as Gezer with Phœnician-Canaanite, in contrast to Moabite and Edomite-related Judean inscriptions.

2. The settlements in the highlands north of Jerusalem, now the West Bank region of Nablus—which had played the central role in Finkelstein’s study—have a distinctive, coherent and continuous history in this region from at least the beginning of the twelfth century until the end of the Iron Age. The region developed state structures—known as Bit Khumri in Assyrian texts—by the mid-ninth century, BC. This region had such a sufficiently coherent population that one could well speak of a ‘proto-ethnic’ or even ‘proto-Israelite’ political and cultural unity.
3. A third, separate and distinct, history was the Judean highlands, where, new settlement in Iron Age I, with only a dozen or so villages, lags substantially behind that of the northern regions.

A trans-regional unity of highland Palestine is unlikely from the topography. Late in Iron I, new settlement is first intensely engaged, and Lachish—with its pig-bones—seems the dominant town of the region.

How does Jerusalem fit into this picture? In the Middle Bronze Age, Jerusalem was the natural market town of the Ayyalon Valley, but its association with the Judean highlands is not so obvious. Archaeologically, no Late Bronze Age Jerusalem has been found, though from the Amarna tablets one must have existed somewhere. The tenth century revealed only a retaining wall, but Kenyon’s excavations unearthed a small town in the Iron II period. Only after the destruction of Lachish in 701 BC does Jerusalem become, as Sennacherib put it, the “city of Judea”, and grow to a city’s size, the capital of a small state. It is only just over a century to its destruction by Babylon, and in that time its people have to create a self-understanding, while the Nablus hills—the former Bit Khumri—is under Assyrian patronage and possibly ruled from Assyria. Jerusalem and Judea’s proto-ethnic understanding, if it had existed, must have been different from that of Samaria’s.

## The United Monarchy

The biblical “Golden Age” was in the 40 year reign of David and another 40 year reign of his son, Solomon, each reign a precise generation. These famous kings were supposed to have lived in about 1000 BC but archaeologists have been unable to find a brick of any Jerusalem built at this time. How can the documentation of these king’s deeds be so detailed yet the evidence in the earth not exist? Because they are myths, not history, as the idealized periods of their reigns shout out, but no one—least of all biblical scholars—has ears to hear.



The kingdom of Solomon supposedly extended from Egypt to Anatolia in the north, and Mesopotamia and Arabia in the east. Not a vestige of any such empire has been found whether through digging or through studying ancient texts. Neither Solomon nor his predecessors, David and Saul, ever appear in the correspondence of foreign kings or in triumphal monuments. Solomon's most famous project, a temple, ought to have left substantial foundations, one would have thought. Nothing! Ignorant Christians think the "Wailing Wall" revered by Jews is the temple of Solomon but that is Hadrian's temple, not even Herod's built just before Jesus was born. It is the temple built by the Romans when they destroyed Jerusalem as a Jewish city—over a thousand years after Solomon's putative reign.

Be sure to understand! After a hundred or more years of historical and archaeological searching, *nothing* has been found of these famous biblical kings. The only conclusion is that they are myth! It is not simply that the direct names have not been found or that the digging is in the wrong place, it is that there is no possibility that anything on the scale suggested by the bible existed at the time. Everything that has been turned up points to a desiccated and depopulated country of shepherds and sheep.

Proof that the scriptures are not telling real history is that they say nothing about natural events—the flood is a known myth and the plagues of Egypt cannot be tied to anything recorded in Egyptian history. There are no mentions of earthquakes, in a place situated next to an active rift valley or about droughts, in an area on the edge of a desert. Known famous historic battles like Megiddo (the origin of Armageddon), Lachish and Qadesh are ignored. The Israelites mythically lived in Egypt for 400 years but there is no mention that Egypt ruled the country as a colony for 400 years.

## **The Mycenaean Drought**

There was a period of prolonged drought in the eastern Mediterranean called the Great Mycenaean Drought because it supposedly ended the civilisation of the Mycenaean Greeks. It lasted for hundreds of years around 1200 BC and brought the two superpowers of the day, Egypt and the Hittite Empire, into conflict after centuries of prosperity, trade and co-operation. The hill country of Judaea is at the edge of the boundary between the region of Mediterranean climate and the semi-desert climate. The drought advanced the desert into the formerly Mediterranean area and times got hard. Desiccation turned the hill country arid and suitable only for nomadic shepherds following the seasonal rains.

Like the hopeful Christians and Jews of Jericho digging, there have been continuous digs in Jerusalem but no one has ever found any strong evidence that Jerusalem existed at this time. It might have existed as a negligible town but was nothing like the biblical description. The important town in the region was about 25 miles to the west in Lachish.

The New Kingdom Amarna letters contain a lot of correspondence with minor princes of Palestine and speak of a town of Urusalim and its king Abdihepa. In this time the whole region was an Egyptian colony, not the disadvantage one might expect because it was a buffer zone and therefore fairly favoured and it provided some commodities the Egyptians desired, namely olive oil in particular. The drought, however, badly affected the olive crops and the Egyptians concentrated on supporting the main lowland centers. The hill country therefore was not a concern to the Egyptians during the Great Drought and was quite unpopulated. Urusalim must be Jerusalem, which therefore existed in some form as early as this, but since it has not been found in the earth, it

must have been little more than an encampment. Alternatively, it was the name of the whole region later called Judah, not a town but a few arid hills inhabited by mountain goats and wild asses.

The drought began to ease at last from about 1000 BC and the Mediterranean climatic region returned to the hill country by degrees. The improvement in climate led to the wealthy lowland families and merchants sponsoring the hill country statelets to effect the change to agriculture. Merchants from the large market towns like Lachish wanted a better return from the hill country as it improved and had to make the nomads settle. Watch towers and light fortresses were constructed in the hills to regulate the movement of the nomads, who had shepherded their sheep there for generations, and force them to settle and turn from sheep to more valuable olives and vines.

The lowland merchants financed the shepherds to build terraces to trap the topsoil and allow them to grow olives. It was money to make money, because the prosperity of everyone improved as a consequence. In the next 200 years, as the climate improved, the shepherds turned to growing olives and vines and improved their wealth and prospects. Jerusalem might have grown under the influence of this economic revival, but there is no archaeological evidence of it. Kathleen Kenyon, whose approach to archaeology was practical and honest, not conditioned by biblical preconceptions, found a substantial Iron Age wall in Jerusalem dating to about 950 BC but there was no substantial town to go with it, so it must have been some kind of fort to monitor nomadic movement.

Whether as shepherds or as olive farmers, they cultivated only one main item and depended on markets to obtain the others necessities of life. Jerusalem could have served that function but did not exist, at least on a sufficiently large scale, until the seventh century. Lachish, protected by the Egyptians, was the main market town and remained so after the Egyptians withdrew until the Assyrians arrived. The Assyrians destroyed Jerusalem's lowland rival Lachish in 701 BC leaving the hill top town as the regional centre. Then Jerusalem began to prosper.

The region was back to its pre-drought prosperity by about 800 BC. This is the time when the small states of Israel, Moab, Edom, Ammon and Philistia were created to enforce the switch from pastoralism to agriculture and to administer the improving economies of the area. Concerning Edom, charcoal samples from Khirbet en Nahas give calibrated C-14 dates of 1200 to 950 BC, suggesting some Iron I settlement and mining activity. But most evidence from three sites including Taliwan and Bozrah show no signs of permanent settlement before the end of the 700s BC when the Edomite state might have been founded at Bozrah. E A Knauf thinks the Edomite king list in *Genesis* 36:31-39 is sixth century BC at the earliest. Diana V Edelman summarises:

There is no clear evidence of an Edomite state in the late tenth century BCE.

Israel had been founded to the north of Jerusalem with its capital at Samaria. Omri (Khumri) is the founder of Samaria in the Jewish scriptures and the House of Omri (Bit Khumri) has been discovered mentioned in old records of the time. This seems to be one of the earliest memories of true history in the bible.

## **Jerusalem**

In the ninth century BC, Shalmaneser III of Assyria took tribute from the king of Israel, "Yeho, son of Omri". In



the second half of the eighth century BC, Tiglath-pileser III subjected most of the region, deposed Peqar, the king of Israel, and placed Hosea (Saviour) on the throne. Sargon II eventually annexed Israel and, following a well established imperial policy, transported the leading citizens. Some of the farms were abandoned for a while and reverted to brush but then the deportees were replaced by people from Elam, Syria and Arabia. The newcomers were absorbed, the economy recovered and the culture and practice of the state continued. Contrary to the bible, the whole of the population was not removed and the state destroyed, though it became a colony of Assyria.

The population of Lachish were not so fortunate in 701 BC. The Assyrians *did* murder and deport them all, but they did not destroy the city—the Babylonians and later the Persians did. In the next 50 years Jerusalem grew five-fold to a population of 25,000 people by about 650 BC. Conceivably a temple was built in this period of prosperity but there is no scientific evidence it was. All the evidence points to the first temple being the second temple! The idea that the temple was preceded by a first temple seems to be biblical mythology.

Jerusalem's initial spell of prosperity did not last long. In 597 BC then in 586 BC it was attacked by the Babylonians. As in the previous cases, the Babylonians pursued the policy of transporting the leading lights and artisans of a population and Judah was left leaderless and impoverished. Jerusalem was not destroyed as Lachish had been but it fell into disrepair from neglect over the next 50 years.

Summarising, Thomas L Thompson writes that 'in the historical developments of Palestine between 1250 and 586, all of the traditional answers given for the origins and development of "Israel" have had to be discarded:

- ☐ The patriarchs of *Genesis* were not historical.
- ☐ The assertion that "Israel" was already a people before entering Palestine whether in these stories or those of Joshua has no historical foundation.
- ☐ No masive military campaign of invading nomadic "Israelites" ever conquered Palestine.
- ☐ There was never an ethnically distinct "Canaanite" populatiuon whom "Israelites" displaced.
- ☐ There was no "period of the Judges" in history.
- ☐ No empire ever ruled a "united monarchy" from Jerusalem.
- ☐ No ethnically coherent "Israelite" nation ever existed at all.
- ☐ No political, ethnic or historical bond existed between the state that was called Israel or the "House of Omri" and the town of Jerusalem and the state of Judah.
- ☐ In history, neither Jerusalem nor Judah ever shared an identity with Israel before the rule of the Hasmonaeans in the Hellenistic period.

## **Babylonian Deportation**

The population of Judah did not cease to exist in 586 BC and Jerusalem and its region were not entirely depopulated after the Babylonian army took the city. Those who may have been taken to Babylon in one of the many deportations from Palestine to Mesopotamia during the first millennium BC cannot be assumed to have been ethnically or religiously related to any of the several groups who identified with a self-understanding of Hezekiah's remnant Jerusalem, but as a *returning* remnant, with "exile" as their self-defining literary paradigm. The unskilled population left behind struggled on in poverty again shepherding their flocks until the king of Persia, Cyrus, issued an edict that Jerusalem should be "restored" as a vassal state of the Persian Empire. The "Jews"

were to be “restored” to their rightful kingdom and their god “restored” to his temple. Cyrus sent bodies of people to carry out his edict and the poor people who had been left behind on their own hillsides for fifty years wanted to participate in the wonderful project. Their pleas were ever rejected and they were villified by the newcomers who had “returned” from “exile” as Samaritans and Am ha Eretz.

The quizzical marks in the previous paragraph highlight a fact of the “exile” that scholars do not tell the punters. The Assyrians from about 850 BC had a policy of transporting the leading classes of a conquered country to some distant part of the empire. The idea was plain. The leaderless people remaining were not likely to cause trouble and the deported people would be too insecure and busy establishing themselves elsewhere to bother about revolution. Even minor kings had the same policy. Mesha of Moab, on the Moabite Stone, says he attacked the city of Ataroth, built by the King of Israel, and slaughtered “all of the people of the town to satisfy Chemosh... settling in the city the men of Sharon... and Maharith”.

Even the Jewish scriptures admit it, and tell us of deportations unknown otherwise in history, if they are not excuses. In *Ezra* 4:2, the biblical author makes out that the natives of Judah, who want to help the Persian colonists to build the temple, were put there by Esarhaddon king of Assyria (680-669 BC). These people said, “we seek your God, as you”, and that they used to worship him as new deportees in the days of Esarhaddon. So, they had been sent in by Esarhaddon and made to worship Yehouah! If this is true then it is an Assyrian deportation unconfirmed elsewhere. It is not the only one that this author reveals. He also mentions, in *Ezra* 4:10, “the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnappar exiled and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest of the province ‘Beyond the River’ ”. This king is Ashurbanipal (668-627 BC) who received the submission of twenty-two kings of the west, and, having exiled captives from Kirbit to Egypt, he was obviously deporting people. Together, they seem to be excuses to ignore the Samaritans and the Am Ha Eretz as not genuine worshippers of Yehouah.

This much the scholars admit, but the real point is that the Assyrians presented the move to the people being deported as a salvation from their oppression by their rulers in the land in which they lived because they had previously been deported there! Not all the people being thus deported were fools but they were in a dodgy situation and the Assyrians softened the blow by giving them every assistance in their new colony—land, status and the protection of the empire against the natives.

They were led genuinely to believe that they were being helped by their deporters and they were helped by being granted privileges as long as they did as the king decreed. It seemed this could only be if the story was true, and, of course, if they chose not to believe it, protection could be withdrawn and they could be left to be massacred by the native populations. It paid to co-operate! They were led to think of themselves as pioneers in what was supposedly their own land, restoring the forgotten traditions of their ancestors. Their wealth and power was gone but they were clever and skilled people who were able to make a success of rebuilding. Ultimately, the policy was meant to melt the divers populations of the empire together into a coherent amalgam.

Nabonidus, the Babylonian king, mistakenly called Nebuchadnezzar in the scriptures, followed this policy in restoring Harran. He assured a mixed group of people they were “returning from exile” to their rightful home in Harran and that they could set up and worship their own gods there. However, the true and original god of Harran was the god, Sin, the Lord of Heaven, and the empire would be sponsoring a grand temple to the original god restored to his rightful glory. Nabonidus presented himself as a restorer of gods and a saviour of peoples.



Needless to say, though some of the “returners” will have set up shrines to the gods they brought with them, before long the grand temple of the original god, Sin attracted all the customers and the shrines quickly closed. If this should sound familiar, so it should. Cyrus, Xerxes, Darius and Artaxerxes all published documents expressing the same policy as Nabonidus and declaring themselves as restorers of gods and saviours of people. It is precisely what Cyrus and his successors did in Judah.

## Cyrus the Persian

Cyrus allowed some people to return to the hill country of Judah and restore the rightful god of the land, Yehouah, but the cult of this god turned out not to be the one worshipped by the Samaritans, the native people of Israel. The scriptures mention this Persian king 19 times and tell us about his edicts no less than eight times (2 Chr 36:22,23; Ezra 1:1,2; 4:3; 5:13,17; 6:3,14; Isa 44:28). *Isaiah* (Isa 45:1) also declares that Cyrus was God’s anointed—the messiah or saviour of the Jews, and God’s shepherd.

It is unlikely if many, if any, of the the Jews who were returned from exile were previously natives of Judah or descendants of them, though later, when movement was freer, some will have been. The bible is clear that the people who “returned” wanted nothing to do with the people who had remained behind. Josephus (c 38-100 BC), the Roman-Jewish historian, writing in his apology for Judaism, *Contra Apionem* (1:13), could not be clearer:

Chaldaeans... since our original leaders and ancestors were derived from them, and they do mention us Jews in their records because of the kindred there is between us.

Here the Chaldaeans are the Babylonians and Josephus is plainly saying that Jews descended from Babylonians and not Jewish exiles. Astonishing confirmation from a different direction comes from Mrs E S Drower who, in *Mandaeans*, tells us:

Both Jews and Chaldaeans are called Yahudai in Mandaean scripts, showing that they were considered one nation by the Mandaeans... Nebuchadnezzar is called a Yahudai.

However, Chaldaeans specifically means Babylonian Magi, and the colonists sent by the Persian king were probably Babylonian priests. Chaldaeans is the same word as Chasidim, which means “The Holy Men” in Hebrew, and were a well-known sect in Hasmonean Judah, and precursors of the Essenes!

The accounts of the “return” in *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* suggest a long period in which the task of restoration was unaccomplished. The narrative obscures that there were four separate “returns” under the four kings of Persia, Cyrus, Darius, Artaxerxes I and Artaxerxes II. *Ezra* 6:14, records edicts of Darius and Artaxerxes as if to illustrate that the policy was a continuing one of near eastern monarchs.

Assyrian records indicate deportations from Hazor and Galilee in 733, Samaritans were deported in 722 (2 Kg 17) and people from Hamath and Babylon were moved in. People were deported from Jerusalem and Judah in 701, according to Assyrian records. People were carried off by Babylonians from Jerusalem (2 Kg) in 597 BC and 586 BC. Persians deported people into Judah in 538 BC and on three subsequent occasions. Samaritans were deported to Alexandria under Alexander. Alexander also settled Macedonians in Sebaste. Ptolemy Soter (Saviour) of Egypt deported a great number of Jews to Egypt as soldiers in 320, and in 312

transported another large number to Cyrene and Libya. Seleucus did the same when he built Antioch. Ptolemy Philadelphus moved more Jews into Egypt and supposedly translated the Jewish scriptures into Greek. Antiochus the Great moved 2000 Jewish families from Babylon to Phrygia and Lydia where their Hellenized descendants were the basis of Paul's mission.

The Samaritans apparently also experienced another "return" (*Ezek 36; Jer 21*). Yet another "return" is mentioned in the *Damascus Rule* where the Righteous Teacher and a remnant returned from exile. The final dispersion of the Jews—effectively the same programme of pacification continued now by the Romans—was the diasporas of 63 BC, 70 AD and 135 AD when the markets were said to be full of Jewish slaves who later became freedmen in various parts of the empire, their freedom often bought by already free Jews. The implication of the name of the Synagogue of the Libertines (*Acts 6:9*) is that it was for freed Jews.

Note that in the biblical accounts in *2 Kings*, "all" the people were carried off twice and yet some were left to escape later to Egypt. None of these dispersions and deportations were total, that is mere biblical hype. The northern state was said to have been totally carried off because the Jews who wrote the scriptures wanted an excuse for not liking their northern neighbours in Samaria who had an independent cult of Yehouah. So they pretended that Samaria was not Israel.

No deportation can be certainly linked to the same people or their descendants returning. It was the "return" of somebody officially sponsored by the Persian administration that created Judaism. There was a temple in Jerusalem by about 400 BC we know from a documentary source, a letter from Elephantine on the Nile to the High Priest in Jerusalem.

In each place that an old god was restored, he was restored with the title, "king of heaven". The rulers wanted everyone to worship the same god and their idea was that eventually, everyone would worship a "king of heaven" with broadly the same characteristics and merely having different names. The Great King of the empire could then be shown to have the same role on earth as the universal king of heaven, and the various kings of heaven could be shown to be different versions of Ahuramazda, unifying everyone. The effects of this universal mixing of peoples was that:

- ☐ Aramaic became the language of the whole area.
- ☐ "Jews" accepted that they had "returned" but they never accepted the natives of the hill country as being Jews.
- ☐ The "Jews" that had "returned" used some Samaritan legends but rejected the rest of the cult and devised a new religious "tradition".
- ☐ The people that had remained in Judah never accepted those who returned.
- ☐ The people who had remained in Judah did not accept the "restored" religion.

The historicity of the deportations is shown by the West Semitic names that appear in the city rolls of various Assyrian cities and military rolls at this time. But, though this mass movement of people under Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans was a continuous imperial policy, the bible never declares it as such and, rather the opposite, gives the impression it happened only to Jews.

The Persian name for the statelet that supported Jerusalem was Judah, but how significant a state was it?

Herodotus wrote his famous histories in the middle of the fifth century, about the time that we think Nehemiah was sent as governor to Jerusalem but about thirty years before Ezra really imposed Persian policy. Herodotus notes the towns and peoples of the Levant but mentions no people called Jews or even Israelites! People of these names cannot have existed then or were insignificant. Admittedly, a whole section of the Histories, the part describing Assyria, has gone missing! It is the very part of the book that might be expected to mention the statelets of Judah and Israel and throw light on the formation of Judaism. Its disappearance suggests that Christians did not find in it what they wanted to read and suppressed it.

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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 1. The Crisis of Sacred History

### Persians to Greeks

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#### The Greeks

Alexander of Macedonia defeated Darius and conquered the mighty empire of Persia, briefly creating the greatest empire the west had ever known. Alexander saw the sense of winning over the Jews, who had remained loyal to the Persians who had founded them and favoured them as a loyal outpost of the Persian belief in the universal God of Heaven, and therefore of the Almighty's king of kings on earth, the Persian king. The Jews of the Jerusalem temple had yielded peacefully to Alexander who then worshipped before the Jewish God. Later, the Jews of Babylon surrendered immediately to the conqueror, and other Babylonian Jews submitted too. Shortly, Alexander had a Jewish contingent in his Babylonian army.

Alexander aimed at unification by promoting cultural assimilation and set up Greek cities, administered in the Greek way and operating Greek schools, religions, gymnasia and theatres. The Jews adopted the Greek way of doing most things and incorporated them in their sacred writings. In the Hellenistic period the Jews adopted the Greek habit of teaching in schools in which they imparted the skills taught in Greek schools, poetry, philosophy, reading and copying, and began the habit of commenting on texts. When they came to writing a history of themselves they used many of these Greek arts and also the Persian concept of linear history.

Alexander had no thoughts of changing the Persian and Assyrian policy of pacification and continued to deport people. Thompson describes Judaism as "Asiatic Hellenism". Jews were central to the life of Alexander's new empire and many of his cities like Alexandria, Antioch and Babylon had large Jewish populations whether by deportation or by voluntary mercantilism. The Samaritans, on the other hand, rebelled against the Greeks and Alexander massacred whole sections of the population. Other Samaritans he moved into his new city, Alexandria, in Egypt and replaced them with Macedonians from his own country, organized as a military colony at the heart of Palestine.

But Alexander's empire split into two main divisions after his death, a northern, Seleucid, branch and a southern, Ptolemaic, branch. Palestine initially was under the Egyptian kings, the Ptolemies, but later the Syrian Greeks, the Seleucids, took over. Samaria (Israel) tended to look to the Seleucids and Judah toward the Ptolemies, accentuating the differences between the two statelets.

#### Ptolemies and Seleucids

When Ptolemy seized Jerusalem against little opposition because it was the Sabbath day in 320 BC, he took many prisoners from Samaria as well as Judaea and settled them in Egypt. A few years later in 312 BC, Ptolemy was again campaigning in Palestine and razed several large towns to the ground, again forcing many people to emigrate to Egypt, a favourite place being the new city of Alexandria and another being Ptolemy's Jewish colony in Cyrene. Besides the enforced moves of Jews to the new city, Ptolemy welcomed voluntary pioneers from Palestine. All of this movement from Palestine meant that, even as early as the reign of the first Ptolemy in

Egypt, there were probably more Jews in Egypt than in Judaea.

The scriptural book of *Jeremiah* tells of a Jewish diaspora in Egypt (Jer 24:8; 26:22), and during the Persian period many Jews had settled in Egypt with the encouragement of the Persians, to act as military colonies. They did not therefore mix with the native population and preserved their Jewish character. The Egyptians resented the Jews as enemies or agents of their enemies the Persians but Josephus preferred to see it as envy:

The Egyptians were the first to cast reproach on us—when they saw us approved by many, they were moved with envy. (*Against Apion*)

A large district in the region of Heliopolis (On) became exclusively Jewish, a fact reflected in the romance of *Joseph and Aseneth*. Another large Jewish colony existed at Memphis. Documents related to the imposition of the royal taxation, from Thebes proves that a surprisingly large number of the government's taxation officials were Jewish. The city of Alexandria was divided into different quarters, with the Greeks in the centre, the Egyptians in the west and the Jews to the north-east. So Judaism flourished in Alexandria, but it was of a peculiarly Hellenistic type.

Greek was the language of worship and the scriptures had to be translated into Greek, if the faithful were to be able to read them—they soon knew no Hebrew. Philo of Alexandria's explanation of the divine names proves that he did not understand Hebrew. When *Ecclesiasticus* was translated into Greek, the translator's preface proves that the Egyptian Jews used only the Greek bible. The considerable Greek additions to some of the, particularly later, books of the scriptures like *Job*, *Proverbs*, *Esther* and *Daniel* show that these Greek works had become partially independent of the Hebrew versions that were later taken by the Rabbis as canonical. The *Wisdom of Solomon* never had a Hebrew original, having been composed in Greek.

The Greek additions to *Esther* were written by a priest called Lysimachus in excellent classical Greek. He supposedly wrote originally in Jerusalem but sent his script to Alexandria in the hands of a Levite called Ptolemy! The story suggests much about the writing of the Jewish scriptures generally, not merely *Esther*. The scripts were sent to Alexandria for Ptolemy's library, and the latest additions were actually written in Greek. Cleopatra might have been taking manuscripts for her restoration of the library until near her death in 30 BC. In the first century BC, Simeon Ben Shetah altered the Jewish Ketubah or wedding contract to make divorce more difficult, basing his revision on a third century BC Ptolemaic model.

In Palestine, the century of Egyptian Greek rule was mild so long as the requisite tribute was paid. Indeed, the Jews were allowed to rule themselves, or rather be ruled by a Jew—the High Priest.

The northern Greek empire began under Seleucus Nicator (312-281 BC) who had his capital at Babylon. The western edge of his empire, abutting the Mediterranean at Antioch and stretching to the northern Euphrates, became known as Syria, a lazy pronunciation of Assyria. In 198 BC, the king of the northern Greeks, Antiochus the Great (223-187 BC), drove off the southern Greeks and took Phoenicia and Judaea. The Ptolemies were never to regain it, but again many Jews deserted Judah for Egypt. Antiochus settled Jews from Babylon into Lydia and Phrygia where three centuries later Christianity was to take root.

The Ptolemies were always preferred by the leading Jews in Jerusalem to the Seleucids even though the

Seleucids granted Jews full civil rights in all of their great cities and foundations (Josephus *Antiquities* 12:3). But the Ptolemies plotted and intrigued with the Jews against their Syrian rivals—later with the connivance of the advancing Romans. Josephus in *Contra Apionem* makes no attempt to disguise his preference for the Ptolemies, and they did generally treat the Jews well, Jonathan Maccabee being honoured by them in *1 Maccabees* 10:57-60.

## Hellenization in Judaea

Throughout the period from before 300 BC to the Maccabaeen revolt, the Jews were under the domination of the Greeks and the spread of Greek culture and institutions profoundly influenced the tiny theocracy. The theatre, schools and gymnasia were introduced. New political institutions like a senate (gerusia) presided over by the High Priest but set up on Greek lines required a senate house. It was in this period that the Sanhedrin (Greek: *synhedrion*, a council) was created—about 190 BC, perhaps evolved from the senate, as a council of “rulers”. Greek social life required places to walk and talk and meditate, the *Stoas*, cool, cloister-like galleries for lounging and discussion (from which the word Stoic comes) and soon to be realized in the porticoes of Herod’s temple.

Whole areas were thoroughly Hellenized at this time. Not just Decapolis but apparently the whole of the east bank of the Jordan was Greek. Many cities on the west side, especially on the coast of the Mediterranean were entirely Greek in style and organization. Samaria and Pnias had been settled by Alexander’s Macedonians from the outset, and were thoroughly Graecized. *1 Maccabees* makes it quite explicit.

A new class of educated Jews spoke Greek and became the administrative and priestly class of “scribes”. “Scribe” in Hebrew is “Soferim” and properly means “bookmen” because they taught out of the *Book of the Law*, provided by Ezra—their tradition came down from the time of the Persian administrators. The law they taught was oral and not subject to exegesis, though they seem to have made their own modifications as needed. Apart from people interested specifically in religion like some priests, Pharisees, scribes and Essenes, the common people will have known no Hebrew. They spoke mainly Aramaic and some knew sufficient Greek to get by. Further east, the Babylonian Jews spoke a different dialect of Aramaic but no Greek.

Jerusalem and its immediate surrounding population of loyal Jews—since the edicts of Cyrus, those within a day’s march, say 25 miles of the temple—seemed an island among the Greek provinces. Polybius, at the beginning of the second century BC speaks of the Jews as “those who lie about the sanctuary called Jerusalem.” The city was little more than the temple and what was needed to service it, and later the Maccabees found Hebron, twenty miles south, a hostile Idumaeen town. the Nabataean Arabs pressing north from the south of the Dead Sea had pushed the Idumaeans before them, squeezing places the Jews liked to think of as their own. To the east, the Jewish sphere extended to the Jewish town of Jericho.

## Abomination

The Seleucid ruler Antiochis III took over Jerusalem in about 200 BC, granting privileges to the Jews of the city. Since the Jews were privileged from Persian times, the new administration will perhaps have been restating traditional privileges, more than granting new ones, as priests and temple functionaries.

In 173 BC, a group of Jews called the Tobiads, who had apparently not been recognized as Jews by the



founders of the religion under the Persian administrators, opposed the priesthood and the High Priest, Onias III, and invited Antiochus to depose him. Onias was probably murdered and his son Onias IV fled in 170 BC with a large body of Jews to set up an alternative temple at Leontopolis in Egypt that lasted until the Roman dispersion of the Jews in 73 AD. Its closure by the Romans shows that it was regarded as a legitimate Jewish temple! The Falashas, the Jews of Abyssinia, had the 24 books of the scriptures but knew nothing of the Talmud and did not observe the Feasts of Purim and Hanukkah, suggesting that they had split from mainstream Judaism before the victory of the Maccabees. Yet, their scriptures are based on the *Septuagint*, so perhaps these Jews descended from those who were founded by Onias at Leontopolis.

In 175 BC, Antiochus IV Epiphanes was short of tribute money for his tribute to Rome, and accepted a proposal from an extremely wealthy Jew, a brother of Onias III called Jason, to buy the high priesthood. Jason was Hellenized and aimed to convert Jerusalem into a Greek polis with its standard institutions such as a gymnasium—effectively a Greek high school—theatre and so on. Jason was appointed and the ruling classes of Jerusalem took to wholesale Graecization. Antiochus visited the new polis, about 173 BC, and was greeted with an official torchlight procession, and the acclamation of large crowds. Soon after, Jason was soon succeeded by a rival, Menelaus, who made a bigger bid for the priesthood, bought the office for a large sum of money then raised it from the population via the temple making him unpopular. Mob violence broke out between the rival factions, and Antiochus had to suppress the Jason faction with bloodshed, and damage to the city and the temple. Antiochus had to build a fortress and man it with soldiers from Syria to keep order. It only created more tension.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes defeated the Ptolemies again in 170 as *1 Maccabees* 1:18-20 describes, and would have gained control of Egypt if the Romans had not given him the hard word and obliged him to withdraw. By the time he returned from Egypt, the dislike between the Jews and Antiochus was fully developed.

Jewish propaganda is that Antiochus enforced Hellenization, but many scholars find this unlikely or even incredible. The truth is that, frustrated in his ambitions, seeing Judaism as an obstinate and prejudiced nuisance, riven with internecine strife, and annoyed by the scheming of the Jews against his plans against Egypt, Antiochus decided with the priests to present the Jewish religion to a variety of Zeus worship. He supposedly robbed the temple of its treasures and reinstated Menelaus, who had been deposed. In addition, Antiochus banned circumcision, imposed Pagan rites and, most notably, he burnt the sacred scriptures! You might wonder then what we have before us in the bible.

He removed the two cherubs of the Ark from the Holy Place, where supposedly there were no images, and set up an image of Zeus Olympiakos in the heart of the temple on the table of burnt offerings— “the Abomination of Desolation.” Since Olympiakos means “heaven,” Zeus was simply the Greek version of the God of Heaven, a Greek Yehouah, it cannot have seemed such a big deal to anyone.

Hellenization was the policy of the already Hellenized priests, and many, if not most, of the population concurred. Some Jews, though, favoured the Ptolemies and the Romans, rather than the Seleucids and the defence of the established religion was a good reason to cause trouble for the northern Greeks. Mattathias and his five sons, claiming to be religious purists, rebelled.

Doubtless as many Hellenizing Jews welcomed the move as traditionalists, called the Hasidim or Pious Ones,

who preferred the religion as it had come down to them from the Persians, not the Greek innovations, but the latter were outraged. This was in 168 BC. A civil war broke out in which the Maccabees led the rebellion against the Seleucid kings for 25 years. They were supported as terrorists in this enterprise by the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Romans, who used both to weaken the northern Greeks before annexing them into the empire.

So, the outcome was the opposite of Antiochus's intentions, if they were to promote peace and Greek culture. The immediate fashion for Hellenization evaporated and a reaction set in. The traditionalists rebelled and the country was rent with civil war. Eventually, the temple was rededicated in 165 BC and then the Jews had independence for the first time in history when Simon Maccabaeus, last of the five brothers Maccabee, finally settled with the Seleucids after a quarter of a century of struggle.

## **Jewish Parties**

With Simon the Just, the surname "Just" appears for the first time associated with the Tobiads. Later it seemed to be particularly Essene and this might be when the precursors of the Essenes, the Hasidim, first entered the stage too. As conservatives attached to the traditional Persian forms of Judaism, they would have opposed the modernisation of the Greeks, but since the ruling class hitherto had favoured the Ptolemies, Simon and his allies favoured their enemies, the Seleucids, who also had the advantage of being in touch with their spiritual home, Babylon. Later, the Hasids came to regard any alliance with the heathen world as an affront to Yehouah.

Perhaps, Simon was the last of the traditional priesthood following Persian ways. His successor Onias III was deposed, but had meanwhile compromised and, thereafter, the priesthood were Hellenized. The Hellenized priests, the Sadducees, could follow the old law insofar as it insisted on temple worship and was a religious law of Judaism, and they were glad to use the power of *Deuteronomy* 17:12 to allow themselves the right to change the law if needed, but otherwise they were happy to follow Greek civil law.

The Hasidim would have none of this. The law would stand as it is—the "law of the fathers." Only that law was of any consequence, but the later prophetic books were elaborated by parties like the Hasidim and the Essenes to protest, pseudepigraphically, against the modernisation of the Greek priesthood, and later their authors began to accept them as equal to the law. It seems the Sadducees were forced to concur that the law was fixed and they left administrative law then to the Pharisees. But they were unconcerned as long as they had the control of the temple. In Jerusalem that was the source of the wealth.

Later the Hasidim themselves split on the issue of the law. They realized that the law of Ezra was inadequate in changing circumstances and yet had decided that it alone had authority. They had to find a way of connecting everyday practical decisions to the law, and so used clever exegesis to extend it. The split was because the Pharisees began to develop an extensive oral law (that was nonetheless written down) to allow for modern circumstances, while the Essenes, though themselves using exegesis, refused to accept oral law and instead devised methods of their own. Pharisees became a body of lay teachers resisting Hellenization by exposition of Torah in public places. The ordinary Jew was indebted for his knowledge and justice to the Pharisees, while the Essenes looked to eschatology as the solution to all problems.

The Maccabees revolted against the Seleucids in 167 BC and eventually won independence from the weakening Greeks in 142 BC. The books of the Maccabees present the victory as a just war against oppression

but really it was the result of Roman provocation to weaken the Seleucids who they had already defeated in 190 BC. Rome's ally was Egypt to whom the southern Palestine hill people looked. The uprising is unlikely to have succeeded without external support, enfeebled though the Greeks were. So, cutting through the noble gloss put on it by the apocryphal books, the Maccabees were terrorists sponsored by the state's enemies.

The Hasmonaeans, better known by their nickname, the Maccabees or Hammers, personal ambitions were veiled by their adoption of an apparent puritanism which gained the support of purist groups like the Hasidim. The pureness was for the Persian form of the religion rather than the Graecized form that was being introduced. Thus they took a strong view of idolatry, destroyed Pagan images, and evicted Pagan people, or forced them to convert and be circumcized to prove it. The people of Pella in the Transjordan were given the choice of circumcision or death. The reaction to all of this Hasmonaean "anti-Paganism" was the first recorded cases of "anti-Semitism" by non-Jews. Nor were the divisions in the country solved. In the late second century, under John Hyrcanus, the Sadducees were formed, and the Pharisees, who may have been traditionalists were forced into joining the militant opposition.

Pharisees were persecuted, exiled and eventually 800 were executed by crucifixion—a possible origin of a myth that became the Jesus myth. The crucifixion of the Pharisees was probably chosen as a Persian punishment because they were the purist faction that supported the Persian stamp of the religion. The opposition invited the Seleucid king Demetrius III to depose the Hasmonaeans, and a curious war ensued with Jews and Pagans on both sides.

On the death of Alexander Jannaeus, his wife, Salome, came round to supporting the Pharisees, and reinstated them. They soon were taking their revenge against the Sadducees. Another group, the Essenes, had been so disappointed by the Maccabees that they withdrew into the desert to avoid the impurities of the Jerusalem temple. Essenes and Pharisees seem likely to have been two varieties of the earlier puritans, the Hasidim. The reason for their disillusionment was that the Hasmonaeans, who claimed to be purists, actually were sponsored from abroad by Greeks and Romans and came to support Hellenization in practice, whether they began that way or not. If there was a difference, it was one of emphasis.

The earlier Hellenizers were happy to introduce Greek culture and practices, but the Hasmonaeans differed in wanting to introduce a Judaized variety of Hellenization, by keeping some characteristically Jewish features. Silver coins minted in Jerusalem for fifty years under the Ptolemies were not devoid of images, as the religion seemed to require. They carried pictures of Ptolemy I, his wife Berenice and an eagle. The Hasmonaeans also had no objection to having Pagan symbols on their coins, and only the last of them took to using the Jewish Menorah instead. The tombs of the priestly nobility were magnificently Greek in style, all except their lack of sculptured figures. This was apparently a puritanical fashion, or token, because figures, especially animals or legendary creatures, seemed not to have been proscribed so long as they were not God. The Jewish aversion to figures generally seemed to have been a puritanical fad of the civil war period of about 166-136 BC. The kings were not so fussy to judge by the coinage, but priests who seemed thoroughly acculturated to Hellenism, adhered to certain aspects of the purer Persian Judaism.

The Hasmonaeans set up a Jewish free state for the first time in history. Only then were they able to write a Jewish history, a mythical, fanciful and bowdlerized history that today is the word of God. The Beth Midrash, the Jewish Academy, was based on Greek philosophical schools in their type and organization, although not in their

content. The relationship of student and teacher were similar, and so were methods of exegesis. The Greek model was the only possible one for these schools.

The discoveries in the Dead Sea caves show that the Essenes, at least, were still strongly influenced by Persian religion into *New Testament* times. Lee I A Levine persistently calls manifestly Iranian influences at Qumran, Hellenistic ones, and innocently writes that explaining these influences on the Essenes is “a formidable challenge,” especially as the Essenes had deliberately hidden themselves from all influences by living in the wilderness. Levine finds it all astounding. That in itself is astounding! It is astounding how blind “scholars” can be when they think they have to see for God!

The Hasmonmaean state was a product of Hellenism. It was, in the end, a typical Hegelian synthesis of Iranian Judaism and Greek culture, which sidelined the puritans—the Essenes—until they found fresh life as a gentile religion in the Roman empire.

Jerusalem was small from the Persian period until the Hasmonaeans, but with independence, it expanded rapidly from about 5,000 people to about 30,000. The citizens were Jews who were priests and attended the temple as various types of functionaries. With independence, they also became rulers, politicians and emissaries to Sparta, Rome and elsewhere. Josephus mentions the priests Hezekiah as leader in the time of Ptolemy I, Onias I, a priest who dealt with diplomacy with Sparta, Onias II who was an emissary to the Ptolemaic Greek court in Alexandria. Ben Sirach says that Simon the Just was a High Priest, and the Jason who bought the priesthood from Antiochus made sweeping changes in the city as its ruler.

Jason of Cyrene wrote a five volume acclamation of Hasmonaeon victories about 150 BC. This was epitomized about 120 BC as 2 Maccabees. This period will be when the bible as we know it now was rewritten. It was the Hasmonaeans who gave the temple its pre-eminent importance, and it was the Hasmonaeon family who sanctified it in 164 BC. This is a good time for speculating that the romances of David and Solomon were elaborated as they now are, giving a distant grand history to the Jewish state and temple that the Maccabees were restoring. No synagogues as a communal place or place of prayer are known as early as this, even though it is barely second century. The duties of the people included giving the first fruit of any produce, and of the flocks, to the temple, attending in Jerusalem for the three principal feasts, making offerings to the temple for several types of sin, vows, childbirth and purely voluntary reasons, as well as tithes. The Hasmonaeans also instituted the duty of paying a half shekel to the temple.

## **The Yehudim**

The Maccabees ruled for only a century from 165 BC to 63 BC, but for the first time in Jewish history, the worshippers of Yehouah at Jerusalem had their own free state and Jewish propaganda made Jews self-conscious and hostile to non-Jews. Their main hatred was, however, reserved for the Samaritans, also Jews, but Jews who did not worship at Jerusalem but at their own temple on Mount Gerizim. The fact that the Samaritans were Israelites living in Israel was embarrassing. A myth was invented, or extended, to explain that Samaritans were not Jews, even though they worshipped the god of the Jews.

Jewishness was declared to be an ethnic description of a purely Semitic race rather than a religious description of a mixed race of people that have become more mixed still in the diaspora. It has fed many racist theories

culminating in the absurd theories of the Nazis, but evidently cannot be abandoned by Zionists because it remains the basis of their own claims.

Who then are the “Yehudim,” the “Jews”? By the second century AD, when the rabbis had successfully salvaged what they could from the wreckage of the Jewish war and the insurrection of Bar Kosiba and had withdrawn from proselytising, the term applied to a religious group. Thompson warns:

The geographical spread of people referred to as Yehudim is so great, it would be rash to assume that this name applies to their place of origin.

The truth is that Yehudim meant a religious group from the outset—people who worship the god, Yehouah. The temple at Elephantine in Egypt, according to the letter already mentioned written in 407 BC, existed before the Persian period—before the “return” from exile and so before the so-called second temple of Jerusalem. Yet the author writes on behalf of the “Yehudim,” asking for help to rebuild their temple, a building of stone with bronze doors fitted with silver and gold, which had been pulled down by Egyptians annoyed that the Jews were sacrificing rams, an animal sacred to their god, Khnum. These people mixed and intermarried with the Egyptians, and so were not subject to the exclusivity taught by the Persian administrators, though they remained Yehudin as we can tell from their names. But the Jerusalem priesthood were certain that they were the only priests of Yehouah and it seems they ignored the letter. However the author had also sent the letter to the governor of Samaria. They were, apparently not writing as Jews to the capital of Judah but as Yehudim to the centres where Yehouah was worshipped besides Elephantine.

Could they in any case regard themselves as nationals of the statelet of Judah when their ancestors had been in Egypt for up to 200 years? And was the state of Judah sufficiently big to be thought of as a nation. This letter from Yehudim in Egypt denotes nationality as Aramaean, and it seems far more likely that by then the region as a whole would be considered as the home of Aramaeans. In private letters, people described as Yehudim are denoted as Aramaean.

The Yehudim of Egypt did not worship only Yehouah, confirming that they were not of the same religion as those who the Persians had “returned” to restore Yehouah to his rightful glory. Greetings sent on behalf of gods and goddesses(!) in the letter are from Ishambethel, Anathbethel, Sati, Bel, Nabu, Shamash, Nergal, and Khnum as well as Yehouah.

Israel as well as Yehudim is a name of the religious group of people that worship Yehouah. Israelites are those who worship Yehouah in the biblical narratives, though they are shown as a nation, but in the *Damascus Rule*, Israel denotes those who worship Yehouah and, in fact, the Essenes narrowed it down to those who worshipped Yehouah in righteousness, meaning according to the law. The expression “All Israel” was used to cover those who were less than strict in their practices. So for Essenes, Israel was those who followed the way of perfect righteousness in worshipping Yehouah—they and no others were the children of Israel. When the *New Testament* speaks of children, these are the children it means, not babies still in nappies. Judah and Israel were therefore not nations but names for worshippers of Yehouah.

And the reason is simple. People of small tribes did not see themselves as members of nations but as followers of a god or members of a sect. It has been difficult for Christians reading the *New Testament* to figure out what

was happening with Samaritans, Galileans, Pharisees, Sadducees, and such like, all wandering around freely. The point is that they were not ethnic or national groups but religious sects. They all worshipped Yehouah and therefore were all Yehudim, irrespective of their national or ethnic origins, but distinguished each other on the basis of sectarian differences.

The *Acts of the Apostles* and the letters of Paul make it clear that Jews were happy to accept proselytes or converts of any nation as long as they met the criteria laid down by the law. So, there is no reason to think that a Galilean was someone from Galilee or a Samaritan someone from Samaria. In *Antiquities* (12:1:1), Josephus tells of a deportation of people from the highlands of Judaea and Samaria to Egypt. They squabbled about where they should send their contributions, to Mount Gerizim or the Jerusalem temple but Josephus happily calls them all Jews. Later he amends his position and calls the Samaritans, Phoenicians, Medes and Persians, though still admitting they considered themselves as Jews. Josephus says the Samaritans assisted people persecuted for breaking the food taboos but makes it clear that the accusation was unjustified, so here the Samaritans were guardians of Jewish justice not breakers of the law.

Many soldiers of Cleopatra's armies and some of her main generals were Jewish but were accepted because they were Egyptians by nationality. Josephus speaks proudly of Jews as model citizens widely spread in the world. But he speaks of them as "those that worship God, even of Asia and Europe" making it plain that the distinguishing factor of the Jew is that they worship God, their God, Yehouah, who is the universal God of heaven! Philo of Alexandria makes the same distinction, calling himself a Greek by culture but a Jew by religion, in contrast to the godlessness of the Egyptians.

The Yehudim were neither the people of a small hilly state nor the worshippers of Yehouah specifically at the temple of Jerusalem but were simply worshippers of Yehouah. Samaritans and Essenes, not to mention the Egyptian Jews and many others who did not worship at the temple of Jerusalem, and indeed had a great lack of regard for its priesthood, were nonetheless Yehudim. It was the Maccabees who established a state, and thus were able to promote the idea of Yehudim as a national identity and an ethnic group.

## **The Scriptures**

Whoever the mixture of peoples were that returned to the city of Jerusalem after 500 BC, they were led to believe—and came to believe—that they were the remnant of ancient Israel returning to their rightful land to create a new Israel. Despite their intentions and the Elephantine letter, there is no other sign of activity until the period of the Maccabees when the temple was dedicated in 164 BC.

Much of the *Old Testament* saga is Persian propaganda. The ancestor of the Jews is from Mesopotamia, so, in the myth of Abraham, the Jews are shown to have an ethnic affinity with that region. The anachronism of calling it the Chaldees betrays its late composition. Immediately, the descendants of Abraham are enslaved by the Egyptians and have to undergo countless tribulations before they escape and set up in Israel. The propaganda purpose is plain—to dissociate the inhabitants of the Palestinian hill country from Egypt and paint the Egyptians as their enemies.

Certain proof from much nearer to the time than we are now is furnished by Philo of Alexandria:



Originally the laws were written in the Chaldaean language... (*Vita Moysis*)

The Chaldaean language was the language of Babylonia (Ezra 5:12) at the time of the project of Ezra to set up a new religion in Jerusalem. Why then would Moses, a Hebrew brought up in Egypt under some Pharaoh like Rameses, write in a language of a distant country 800 years later? Philo, an Egyptian Jew, effectively admits the Torah was written by Ezra, a Persian from Babylonia.

The Persians set up the temple to Yehouah and imported a new nobility of priests and Levites loyal to the Persian king to set up a buffer against Egypt. Though Egypt was in decline, it remained a rich and potentially dangerous country with a penchant for freedom from the Persians and an inclination to rebel and cause trouble in the south west of the empire. The Persians set up loyal outposts at such strategic points. Yehud was one of them and it explains the large amount of money spent on the small state and its grasping ruling class.

Though the imperial idea under the Persians and their predecessors had been to set up a universal god, they had introduced certain religious bans to assist the “returners” and this had remained associated with the Yehouah cult of Jerusalem. The Greeks had allowed greater genuine freedom of worship, expecting that the Greek way of life would naturally prevail as it threatened to do, as the Maccabees saw it. The privileged position of the Yehouah cult under the Persians was being undermined as Greek culture won people over.

Greek cities kept Greek municipal law and issued their own coinage. To legitimize these cities, a fashion arose of inventing spurious legends to tie them in with the Greek mainland and the mainstream of Greek history. The Jews of Jerusalem believed the Lacedemonians (Spartans) were fellow Jews and had an agreement with them (1 Maccabees 12:6-9; 20-23). G H Box comments in the *Clarendon Bible OTV*:

The danger of all this was that if this luxurious crop of legends was allowed to grow, all recollections of the earlier history would disappear.

Box, unable to consider the *Old Testament* as anything other than true, thinks this threat was “warded off” but the evidence is growing thick that it was not “warded off” but was realized by the scribes of the Maccabees as the Jewish scriptures—the Christian *Old Testament*—re-assembled nominally from those burnt by Antiochus but really re-written to give spurious validity to the Jewish state, a novel entity created by the Maccabees.

With the rising of the Maccabees, the Persian universal Yehouah was usurped by the local princes of Judah scared of the success of Hellenization. The *Septuagint* version of the scriptures and many of the apocryphal works date from this period or even later. The biblical mood of Israel and Yehouah at war with ungodly nations is not a symptom of God’s timeless plan against wickedness but is the singular expression of the state of the world as seen from the throne of the successful Maccabaeen melchizedeks. For more than 200 years this god was a god of the Jewish nation in revolt.

In 1 Maccabees 1:56-57, apostate Jews rent in pieces and burn any books of the law they find, and anyone possessing one is liable to be murdered by order of the Greek king. 2 Maccabees implies that what survived of the documents of the law and of the library of Nehemiah were collected together again after the ravishes of the wars with the Greeks. The books must have been scattered and fragmented and the passage (2 Macc 2:14) suggests it was Judas Maccabee who put them back together again as best he could. He collected the

fragmentary remains of Jewish tradition and, at some stage later, they were worked up by adding fictional accounts based on the recent Maccabean campaigns into the Jewish Scriptures. The alignment of the dates of *Genesis* is based on the Hellenistic idea of a Great Year of 4000 years. Since the Great Year was timed to conclude in the year 164 BC when the Maccabees dedicated the temple in Jerusalem, it is plain that the books could not have been written earlier.

One scriptural book is plainly written at this time and that is the *Book of Daniel*, purporting to have been written in Babylon in the sixth century, it is clearly written about 165 BC and speaks of such as the “Abomination of Desolation” and the start of the rebellion of Judas Maccabee. The effort is damned with faint praise. So, the book is cool toward the rebels, led as they were by practical political men of doubtful piety despite their supposed motives. Yet, it displays an apocalyptic spirit that was to be an important inspiration in the next 300 years, leading to the various Jewish wars and the beginning of Christianity. It was the spirit of martyrdom.

There is more evidence from the time of Simon Maccabee that the Jewish scriptures were re-written after their destruction by Antiochus. The *Psalter* was compiled at this time and contains Maccabaeian psalms and many that have the clear stamp of Essenism. No clergyman can honestly think that the psalms were written by king David in about 1000 BC. King David is almost certain to be as historical as Frodo Baggins so cannot have written anything, but even supposing he indeed lived, few of his putative works will have survived until the *Psalter* was compiled toward the end of the second century BC.

In *Genesis* 15:12-16, the period of enslavement in Egypt is 4 generations but is 400 years showing that a Patriarchal generation was taken to be 100 years, accounting for the ages of the Patriarchs. There are twelve one hundred year generations from the birth of Abraham to the first temple (1200 years). At the time of the Maccabees, however, a Jewish generation was 40 years, so there are also 12 forty year generations from the Exodus to the first temple and another 12 forty year generations from the first temple to the edict of Cyrus the Persian that ended the exile. Potty Christians will take all this to be proof of God’s divine plan when it ought to be proof of human mythologising. The book of scriptures is shown to stem from the Hellenistic period because of the chronology in it.

This should have been clear from Justin Martyr. Justin enlightened us on the publication of the *Septuagint* He writes:

When Ptolemy king of Egypt formed a library, and endeavoured to collect the writings of all men, he sent to Herod, who was at that time king of the Jews, requesting that the books of the prophets be sent to him. And Herod the king did indeed send them, written, as they were, in the foresaid Hebrew language. And when their contents were found to be unintelligible to the Egyptians, he again sent and requested that men be commissioned to translate them into the Greek language.

Justin Martyr, 1 *Apol* 31

Justin is saying that the *Septuagint* was written between 37 BC when Herod became king of Judaea and 30 BC when the Romans took formal rule of Egypt. Needless to say, this is 200 or more years after the date that biblicists want to accept, but it makes sense because Mark Antony had pledged to Cleopatra that he would repair the damage done to the Library of Alexandria during the wars of Caesar. Herod was a loyal supporter of Mark Antony and gained favour with Octavian by admitting it and promising to be no less loyal to the new

emperor. Herod was therefore undoubtedly helping his friend. This then is when the *Septuagint* was translated, and the Jewish scriptures need not have been compiled much earlier.

This astoundingly means that the biblical scrolls found in the caves of the Judean desert and dated to the second century BC were among the original texts of the scriptures that were still in the process of compilation and re-writing. It accounts for the textual variation found in some books, for differences between the Masoretic texts and the *Septuagint*, and for the frequent agreement between the scrolls and the *Septuagint* against the Masoretic texts. It accounts for the absence of the *Book of Esther* from the scrolls and fragments because *Esther* is arguably the last book written of the Jewish scriptures.

The scriptures, then, were collected in the second century and compiled around 100 BC from the preserved fragments of old traditions—especially from Mesopotamian and Syrian myths from elements of old records, perhaps Assyrian, from tall stories like those of Herodotus, often called the first historian, and from sectarian propaganda like that found in the *Dead Sea Scrolls* and reflecting the religious exclusivity of the Maccabean revolt. The models for the stories of Saul, David and Solomon were the exploits of the Maccabees, and John Hyrcanus (135-105 BC) has been explicitly said to be a model for David. The stories are partial allegories in which the Philistines are the Syrian Greeks.

However, the original Persian aim of promoting Yehouah as a universal god still shines in some of the fragments of the scriptures obviously preserved from an earlier time. Thus much of *Isaiah* and the wisdom literature matches up to the Persian ideal of a god which inspired Plato and the Greeks to develop their highly refined theories of a transcendental god based on the Persian cosmological concept of the sun beyond the sun—the sun of intellect, the god of transcendence.

The fragmentary nature of the scriptures is plain to anyone familiar with them but might not be to modern Christians who do not read their bibles. Many stories are repeated in doublets and triplets which do not agree. There are no less than five stories of the death of Saul in *1* and *2 Samuel* and *1 Chronicles*.

Samuel also anoints Saul twice. In *1 Samuel* 9:26-10:8 he anoints him as he leaves an unknown town. The two are alone, having met as Saul seeks the lost asses of Kish. In *1 Samuel* 10:17-27, he does it again in Mizpah, Samuel first making a divination from the assembled tribes and families while Saul hides among the baggage! In the first part, the question, “Is Saul among the Prophets?” enters the text awkwardly, and it appears again in *1 Samuel* 19 with a different explanation. The authors have sought to give an explanation of a well known saying, but have had two different versions and have included both.

The meeting of Saul and Samuel is described as a fictional account would, with God’s private instructions to Samuel reported by the omniscient author, and events that happened to them in private carefully related. In historical accounts, context is the main element and dialogue is illustrative. Here the account is in dialogue, like fiction. Conversation is central and the detail is psychological rather than physical. God even joins the discussion. These passages do not meet normal historical criteria. The author does not give a proper time and setting, as a history would have. They read as fiction and cannot be assumed to have any historical substance.

Saul seems to have been set a typical mythical task—to find the missing asses—and while accomplishing it finds his destiny. This is the stuff of myths. The asses are the ceremonial mounts of kings before horses were

introduced and remained the same for poor kingdoms in mountains where horses were less sure footed. Thus the finding of the asses is the mythical symbol of being made the king.

Whoever compiled the books of the bible had different scraps of tradition. Not wanting to risk getting it wrong by choosing, they put them all in, in different places. There are few whole or original bible stories. They are collections of fragments of traditions—mythical stories, songs, and poems, sayings, official lists and administrative records. From these fragments the authors have put together a library of books intended to give a history and pride to a new nation.

The scriptures are full of the theme of wandering in the wilderness and then crossing into a new land. It reflects the feeling of the authors and their time that the people at last had a home after many years of wandering in barren places. Linked to it is the idea of exile—that the people have been exiled for too long but God had provided a place for them. Christians have taken these themes as real historical proof of God's unfolding plan over the millennia, but rational minds will take them as proof that the scriptures are a late literary form intended to show that Israel was meant to find nationhood by coming out of their metaphorical wilderness, crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. The scriptures were written as Jewish mythology, to provide the people with an identity, a history, a cause, and a warning that it all could be lost without vigilance.

The *Old Testament* story of Israel is one of the Chosen People failing to live up to God's expectations. It is a story, not of obeying God's will but of apostasy, the problem faced by the Maccabees. It is an extended version of the romance of Joseph and Aseneth, in which Aseneth is Israel shown as an apostate woman unsuitable as a bride for Joseph, a thinly disguised Yehouah. That romance ends happily but in the scriptures each wicked Israel is destroyed except for a "remnant," which goes on to become a "new Israel." It is this remnant that is the "children of Israel" not the Israelites in general. The children of Israel are therefore righteous Israelites, not all Israelites. In the romance Aseneth destroys her idols and returns to God while in the scriptures each righteous remnant tries to build up once more a righteous people.

It was the "re-dedication" of the temple that created the "new Israel"—in fact the only Israel that we are certain ever existed. The Samaritans of the Hellenistic period regarded themselves as the "new Israel" and the "children of Israel," and their few survivors still do. The Essenes and the Christians both also regarded themselves as the "new Israel." Each considered itself the surviving righteous remnant of the old Israel founding a reborn Israel.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 1. The Crisis of Sacred History**  
**History for the Besotted**

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## **The Practice of History**

Those who look upon the past have survived it—they are its offspring and its victors. The western history of writing history draws upon the Hellenic and Jewish historiographic efforts of the fifth century. To find its real roots it should turn to the Zoroastrianism of the Persians and Medes which planted the seeds in Judah and Ionia. They never do. The Persians were not ultimately the victors.

The Jewish scriptures are considered the greatest history book ever, the record of God Himself acting in human history, and Herodotus is called the “Father of History” though his offspring were not fruitful for many centuries—only Thucydides, Polybius, Livy, Sallust and Tacitus in the next 600 years, though the works of others were not liked by the Christian victors and were allowed to decay. Modern historians are superior simply because they benefit from better methods and much more experience, and so are better scholars, if not stylists, and the Jewish scriptures, if historians dared to pronounce on them rather than the clergymen and theologians that call themselves biblical scholars, would be found to be mainly mythology. It is said: “If all the biblical historians that ever lived in the world were laid end to end, they would not reach a historical conclusion.” If they had, it would have destroyed their purpose in life and their sinecures. If the scriptures are history in any sense, it is primitive history and forged history. Creation myths and cosmogonies gave meaning to the past and lessons for the present in primitive societies, forgeries gave rights.

History is the surviving past. Yet, the past is over and done with and cannot be relived, only rebuilt from what it left behind. History is concerned with events, with changes that have occurred. It is rarely clear cut, and the present evidence of it is crucial. The greater problem of history is to establish what this is, to establish fact, rather than interpreting it. No historians think they know all or even most of what could be known, but they believe that, though events are receding into the past, they once happened in reality.

Historical facts are knowable only by the evidence they leave for subsequent ages. Not all of it is recoverable and the study of history is confined to that part of it that has left traces, or can be reconstructed by reason, to fill a hiatus. If something once happened, then it is responsible for still existing clues, and it can be hypothesized what they should be and where they should appear. So, evidence can sometimes be found when it was thought not to exist, and the historian can sometimes construct what was lost from what remains.

The historian cannot but work on the assumption that whatever happened is capable of a rational explanation and that evidence is the product of an act discoverable by reason.

G R Elton

Especially for ages where little has survived, the historian will have to depend not only on extant evidence but also on what is missing but must have existed. Lacunae in the documents and missing books. Searching for the reasons for their disappearance can help fill gaps. Investigating who is behind a piece of legislation, it is natural

to assume that the interests that benefitted by a law were those who demanded it. Admittedly people do not always know what their best interests are, but those that do rarely have any difficulty persuading those that do not. Educated people at least are generally rational and consciously act on the basis of reason much of the time, so inferences based on this assumption are often correct.

Properly conducted archaeology assists history by recovering evidence that can help to reconstruct an event that the archaeology itself is otherwise ignorant of. The site report of the archaeologist has to confine itself to the bare facts of the description of the site, and only by reference to known history or some historical hypothesis can more be said about the meaning of the findings. It can force historians to ask and seek the answers to new questions. Sociology, economics, anthropology and social psychology can also force new questions of historians, to do with class structure, the origins and meaning of social myths and rules. Mythology is unlikely to tell the archaeologists anything reliable.

The historian's main uncertainty is in ignorance and this is better confessed, because thereby there is hope that evidence will emerge, but when certainty is declared, the supposed knowledge is cast in bronze and no progress is possible without a sledgehammer.

Often, there is too much evidence in the sense that the historian cannot deal with it all and has to select from it. This is a source of criticism from would be philosophers, but in practice the arbitrary choice is that of the subject area to be explored. Thereafter, the material is the master of the historian, if honesty is the criterion. If not, the subject is mythology, not history. Mythologists are pseudo-historians. They set out, say, to prove that the Irish were really ancient Egyptians. They will succeed to their own satisfaction because they are interested in creating a myth, and will not admit anything to the contrary. Honest scholars, given the same puzzle, would soon begin to find so many impossibilities in the hypothesis that they would find themselves being led by the evidence in some different direction. That is the sense in which the evidence is the master of the historian. If history is not a search for truth, it is not history.

## **Viewpoint or Prejudice**

Lack of knowledge and the need to select are problems but they are faced up to through proper research standards, scholarship and intellectual honesty. At the end of the search, only one thing is sure, that there is more to be said, and it will be said. Historians ultimately are democrats who enjoy debating in public, and history progresses by the refining of apparently settled questions through exposure to new evidence directly or indirectly. Knowing what other historians have written is essential to do the job. As in any study, there is no point in doing what has been covered to exhaustion or repeating an error, and other scholars will point to sources that they have found useful, problems that they have considered and solutions that might suggest solutions to you. The analytical work of other scholars need not be taken on trust until it has been checked at least in sample, but sometimes it is necessary, especially in peripheral subjects. Further, while studying the history of the last millennium might mean the available material is too extensive to comprehend, earlier periods can allow a diligent scholar to get a grip on most of the available material. In history, as in any scholarly endeavour, reading is the main way of admitting knowledge—and books are not likely to be supplanted by the internet, even for intellectuals.

“History” has a habit of passing people by, leaving them uncomprehending. Only later, when the historian



examines the period can judgements be made about causes that were invisible at the time. Historians, like other people, judge their world from their own experiences and habits, and can therefore be biased. Yet to be universally sympathetic means that judgement is wavered and history becomes bland and of little meaning for anyone. Tepid history will have tepid approval, but that is no valid reason why any historian should suppress a view they hold. Refusal to judge looks like cowardice, but judging based on erroneous criteria deserves criticism. It is through such criticism that history in the end can claim to be objective. Intellectual honesty is to be preferred to a mawkish objectivity.

The materials of history are partial and the judgements of historians are more partial, so history always gives rise to dispute and hostility. The second historian in western history, Thucydides attacked the methods and purpose of the first, Herodotus. Historians are inclined to brutality of expression, and so the debate might look brutal to the onlooker, but it is no more so than were the discourses of medieval theologians.

Every generation rewrites history from its own point of view, and every historian worth reading will be expressing a viewpoint. History from a viewpoint is more interesting history than the tepid variety, and so more likely to be read. If history is not read, it might as well not have been written. So, those who read it must reach their own conclusions from reading different viewpoints. Historians are probably no more prejudiced, blind or wilful than anyone else, but, in as much as they are, their work can justifiably be criticized. Once they are published in journals or books, these products of preoccupation and bias are the common property of all. Those that see prejudice in them can expose it, and can write an alternative history giving another view. Others can look on in concern or amusement or can join in the fun, if they wish. Often alleged bias amounts to criticisms that assail irrelevancies or straw dolls pulled out of the minutiae of the endeavour. A serious attempt to right the supposed wrongs can however progress understanding of the period in question.

A variety of opinion in historical debate reflects the process of historical discovery. The debate is based on evidence that was left by a real event and will converge on it provided that scholars treat the evidence honestly. History is not arbitrary, as some modern intellectuals seem to think, as long as reason remains a criterion of scholarship. There might indeed be several different ways of interpreting a body of historical evidence, but we are not free to take any that we like. If the first of the possibilities is considered unsatisfactory, the critic must explain why some other is preferable. If the critics' arguments have not been given sufficient weight beforehand, then the whole of the evidence was not in, because the emphases were wrong. If the emphases is correct, or there are reasons why the critic is overstating the case, then the first explanation must stand.

What can do nothing of value, and could be dangerous, is to sneer that all history is biased, and pretend that fiction or mythology is just as good. It might be better, especially for right wing groups in society, but that is not considered by liberal critics who think they are *avant garde*. Historical writing can have an effect, so there is a tension between the search for historical truth and the effect it might have. But there is also an effect when truth is suppressed or distorted as propaganda. This too ought to be considered by critics of historians. As long as the debate is on, and the issues are alive, the prejudices of historians, inadvertent or intentional, froth up, are easily seen and skimmed to one side. What endures is what rises above prejudice and becomes a step towards what is sought—historical truth—and the bias of a historian might have been the reason it emerged at all. The background and personality of the historian cannot be bypassed. Politically biased work will rarely stand up, but alternative viewpoints in history can only be stimulating, providing that good standards of scholarship are kept up.

## Could this have been?

Sometimes “history” is only the presuppositions of those attached to some doctrine or theory, and the honest application of some new approach can help to reveal this false history. Religious history regrettably seems immune to any such breakthrough. The doctors of biblical history reject any analysis not based on the fundamental assumptions of their doctrine. Those holding to such views cannot see, or refuse to, that the rejection on reasoned grounds of their interpretation cannot honestly be answered without producing any new arguments or proof, merely by asserting the original again, even more vigorously. For the biblical historian, it is true because it is decreed, they believe, by God!

Others of the same or similar ilk hide behind “the social responsibility of the historian” being “the defence of ‘values’.” This was the expressed view of the American businessman turned historian, Mr Conyers Read who declared that the historian must “accept and endorse” the social controls that “preserve our way of life.” Read was concerned that, unless history was properly controlled, people would seek “more positive” assurance from Rome or Moscow. He wants the historian to join his plot to write mythology, not history—and this is in the modern world! Admittedly people like Stalin and Hitler at opposite poles of the political spectrum have tried writing modern mythology instead of history and perhaps some countries still do it, but they all take their lessons from Christian bishops and from the propagandists who wrote the Jewish scriptures before Christianity.

Read cannot want anyone to know “history” but only some “Big Brother” form of mythology to placate the people. He is no better than Stalin or the Popes—but historians must insist on the truth. Conyers Read should have given up business to become a theologian, not a historian. The historian’s job should never again be reduced to the role of a preacher. The preacher can rest his case on faith but historians should not, but must even question their own beliefs. The task of history is to understand the past. The task of mythology is to control the present. To be properly understood and not metamorphosed into mythology, the past must be respected in its own right. Use of history in the present for theological, political and propaganda purposes must be suspect, and considered dangerous to freedom.

The honest historian must abandon the present except to the extent that it reveals and illuminates the past. Study of history is an intellectual pursuit, the work of a reasoning mind. It must concentrate on the search for truth. These determinedly non-historians assert that, since the past is dead and irrecoverable, and that the historian’s interpretation of historical evidence is subjective, historical truth cannot be found. They seem to think that if we cannot know the whole truth then we might as well know none of it, or anything that they care to tell us. History to these critics is a matter of pure belief or even faith. It becomes the same as biblical history.

The historian’s aim is to seek the truth even if it is no longer entirely knowable, just as the natural scientist aims to understand nature as best as it is possible to do, even if it is ultimately impossible to know it all. Both recognize the problem of certainty and work on the principle of the civil courts that our approximation to the truth is built on the balance of probability. Like a court, the just outcome is based on asking the right questions and accepting the proper standards of probability. This automatically takes account of the Principle of Parsimony (Occam’s Razor) which, is that the simplest explanation, where there are more than one, is the probable one. The answers to historical questions must be probable! They must agree with what is known to be possible in human experience. At the end of a study, when scholars have worked out their reconstruction of history, they must ask:

“Could this have been?” If it could not, then they must abandon their scheme and reconsider the evidence. Christianity pretends to be historical, but on the best criteria of historical scholarship it is not!

History treats the transformation of things, and the historian’s concern is to understand change. History seeks the causes of effects, but has to recognize that the cause has to be shown, not merely assumed. Facts and events are not unique, even if individual and particular, but must be like other things of their kind though never identical with them, part of common experience, before they can mean anything in general. Anything truly unique is a freak that can never recur in meaning or implication and can never be assessed.

## Forged Documents

In historic times, there is the problem of knowing whether evidence, notably manuscript evidence, is genuine or not. The historian has to establish its genuineness and assess its significance. Historians ought to be able to distinguish a modern fake from a genuine article, but even notable scholars have been taken in in recent decades. It is much harder in the case of ancient forgeries and only utterly naïve people will deny that there are plenty of them, especially religious fakes. The *Donation of Constantine* was not exposed until Lorenzo Valla in the fifteenth century, but the papal officials had known all along, or at least for 500 years.

The historian must be trained to be skeptical and critical—everyone should—yet in the case of biblical history, the scholars make a study of what they know to be fakes that they take at face value, trusting to the honesty of a supposed holy spirit. These are not scholars and not historians. The truth can be obtained from fraudulent documents, especially when they are extensive, because it is impossible to maintain proper consistency over many pages of fake documentation. It does not need saying that the holy books of Christian and Jewish scripture are utterly inconsistent, but the scholars of these ancient forgeries spend more time finding ingenious ways of harmonizing them rather than exposing them.

Forgeries, or pseudepigraphs as biblical historians call them, are usually produced, like all fraud, to fool people then alive for the benefit of others, not to fool future historians. However, when a forgery is so successful that it is accepted at the time and becomes a part of history, like the “Donation of Constantine,” it might be difficult to expose. Many people will have a vested interest in refusing to accept the forgery for what it is. Entitlements are the main forgeries made and the many medieval charters are prime examples. V H Galbraith said “forgery was the medieval monk’s pécadillo.” The purpose was to establish legal rights. That is exactly what the books of the *Old Testament* are intended to do. They establish the rights of the colonists sent by the Persians to rule the small country called Yehud. Around these original books, meant to buttress these rights, grew a whole spurious history of Israel and Judah. Biblical historians cannot expose such a fraud because they are not skeptics but believers.

Geoffrey Elton, a professor of Tudor history at Cambridge in *The Practice of History*, says there are no historians used to examining old documents that have not wondered about the genuineness of some document sometime. He advises that, if there is internal or external evidence of forgery, it should be declared as such and only used as a forgery (in short, to show the opposite, or almost so, of what it claims). No one surely could take propagandist literature at face value. If there is doubt that it is genuine but no clear evidence one way or the other, then Elton says it should not be used at all! The doubt utterly invalidates it.

## **Biblical History**

Biblical history is based on two assumptions that no one has ever doubted until recently.

1. The scriptures describe a real historical society.
2. The literature that constitute the scriptures was the product of that society.

Both assumptions are largely false. The scriptural accounts of Israelite history are essentially fictional. Its authors were not Israelites and were not contemporaneous, as the bible often makes out. Philip Davies says:

There can be no serious claim that the biblical texts as we have them derive from the Iron Age.

Non-biblical sources admit to a kingdom of Israel and another kingdom of Judah, but do not suggest any connexion between them, and references supposed to be to Judah cannot certainly be distinguished from references to the Aramaean kingdom of Yaudi. What seems historically secure is that a small country called Israel existed in the hill country of Palestine from about 900 to 700 BC. The authors of the scriptures were initially the Persian rulers of the country in the fifth century, then the Greek rulers and Judaeo-Hellenistic dynasties later on.

Critical reading, like all good enquiry, begins with skepticism, so a text has to persuade the reader who, as a critic, will be checking it for accuracy against other available sources of information. When the text agrees with other sources, it will be believed. Novels, short stories, plays, poetry or other similar literary forms have no need to be so examined because they are making no pretense at truth. We accept that their world is imaginary. The scriptures however claim to be historical, and so invite us to criticize them. They claim to be describing the historical intervention of a supernatural being in the world. If they fail to stand up to criticism, we cannot believe that the events described in them are either true or supernatural.

As to the authorship, the standard interpretation of the bible makes out that the authors are “Israel” as though the whole mass of people called Israel wrote the books of scriptures—under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, naturally. Plainly the whole people were not responsible. Even if the authors were from Israel, they could only have been some literate class of people because the mass of the people in the greater part of the period covered by the bible were illiterate. So, the authors are not representative of the whole of society at all, contrary to biblical commentators. Moreover, the authors were not necessarily, or even likely, to have been members of the society described in these books. They were foreign rulers writing these accounts of the supposed history of a subject people to shame them before God to behave in ways acceptable to the God’s choice of king—the Shahanshah.

## **History for the Besotted**

History is an attempt to show how we got to the present. Modern historians have a lot of past historical material to use as well as highly developed scientific and archaeological skills. Ancient historians had little of this. Some might have had royal or imperial archives or expenditures, but otherwise they depended on stories. They put together sagas based on what they knew, together with what seemed desirable to suit the situation of their own time. Historical works can say as much about the aspirations of the historian’s time as the history he is discussing. This is what happened in Israel when people came to write its history, now called the Jewish

scriptures. They compiled a fictional history based on re-written old stories combined with fictional inserts to paint out blanks and suit the aspirations of the time—the time when the Maccabees had just dedicated a temple to Yehouah and set up a Jewish state for the first time in history.

Palestine is almost devoid of pre-Hellenistic texts. No international power developed there, it remaining divided into local tribes except when united under a foreign conqueror. It never developed culture—art, architecture or literature—until eventually the Maccabees asserted their independence in the second century BC. Everything found before then is essentially Egyptian, Mesopotamian or Phoenician and even after then is mainly Greek or Roman.

Israel is a product of the Persian and the Hellenistic periods. The people deposited into the hill country around Jerusalem in the population displacement known as the “return” arranged by Cyrus, the Persian king, were encouraged to build a temple to “restore” their god, Yehouah, to his rightful glory. Persian experts put together books of law and some legends were invented to justify them.

A few centuries later an independent state did briefly emerge and then the people wrote out a national “history” to glorify the new state and its uncompromising god. The ancient books had been partly destroyed in the freedom battle but from fragments the Hasmonaeen scholars reconstructed what they could and invented the rest. The rebirth of Israel was not a rebirth but a birth because there had never been an independent state before, so the history was a pious forgery and the glory of David and Solomon pure romances to give the people something to live up to.

Biblical experts are usually drunk and cannot be taken too seriously. They are drunk with their preconceptions of the power of God and his Holy Spirit. Were it not for their insobriety, we would today know a lot more about the bible and Near Eastern history than we do. W F Albright was for half a century a famous authority on the bible and biblical archaeology, but he spent his entire professional career totally besotted, so today it requires a scholar to distinguish honest facts from Albright’s drunken wanderings. The books he has written about biblical history are worthless except for amusement. He is often quoted as having written:

There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of *Old Testament* tradition. (*Archaeology and Religions of Israel*)

Yet even when this was written in 1956, it was not true. Almost half a century later, no such claim can be made on any excuse. Albright was able to see in the Balaam Oracles of *Numbers* 23f features that reminded him of the Ras Shamra tablets of northern Canaan in Syria. He drunkenly concluded that the Balaam Oracles were written by a twelfth century BC north Syrian fortune teller! Who knows? Perhaps he was right but his scholarship, if this was the extent of it, was pathetic.

Drunken Christian apologists are certain that, though people could write before the crucifixion, they were all fools. No one had the wit, for example, to write in a deliberately archaic or arcane style to give their screed an illusion of antiquity. Yet these same “scholars” will concede that Luke or the editor of Luke-Acts could do this literary trick and did—but they were Christians guided by the Holy Spirit and so were clever, unlike the moronic Pagans or even Jews who went before. Of course, human mental abilities have not changed noticeably in 35,000 years as any zoologist and anthropologist will confirm, but to the besotted no one was clever until they

had God's revelation.

Once this pious nonsense is ignored, it is possible to see that the Hellenistic authors of the *Old Testament* were quite capable of inventing and emulating old fashioned styles of writing, when it suited them. Otherwise the remarkable thing about the Jewish scriptures is a uniformity of language, proving that they were composed over not more than a century.

Most English speakers today find Chaucer unreadable, but he died only 600 years ago. Hebrew was supposed to have been a vernacular language double this time from Moses until Jesus and should therefore have looked quite different from the beginning of the period to the end. Hebrew linguistic history, like so much else of the ancient Hebrews, is unknown and John Joseph Owen says there "has not been a continuous use of Hebrew." The language is not even called Hebrew until the time of the Greeks and it is not called Hebrew in the scriptures themselves.

Differences there are in biblical Hebrew but they are as likely to be varieties of dialect as chronological changes. In fact, Hebrew is some local dialects of Canaanite adopted by the Persian "returners" as a religious language in the fifth century and spoken thenceforth by priests, Levites and pious Jews, just as Jews today have artificially adopted an invented language—modern Hebrew.

Certainly, the myths and extracts of Jewish history that are recorded in the scriptures when they were written down about 100 BC included much older songs, hymns, poems, fragments of old folk tales and so on, as well as the legacy of the Persian period. But rather more than an apparent antiquity is needed to be sure that something is a genuinely old fragment.

Hymns and songs in particular might be genuinely old, because they are in a memorable and orally transmittable form, but unless the same hymn or psalm is found elsewhere to confirm its age, stylistic quirks are unlikely to be sufficient to judge. Christian writers of hymns rarely fail to use sixteenth century English words like "hath," "thy" and "saith" to give their work the necessary gravity and biblical flavour. The editors of the Hebrew scriptures were quite capable of doing the same. Drop of the holy water, Father?

Cyrus H Gordon, in an article in the fifties on Homer and the bible and in a later book, saw a common background in the Greek and Hebrew writings. For example, *1 Samuel* 5-6 describes a plague which closely follows a description of a plague in the *Iliad*, book 1. The two are most unlikely to be independent. That was controversial if thought to go back to 800 BC but is quite understandable if the Jewish scriptures are late enough to have drawn on the Hellenistic culture that pervaded the world from 300 BC.

### **Is the Bible based on a Historic Kernel?**

A historic kernel can just mean a historical setting and can therefore be nothing more than period detail. Any competent writer setting up a romance in some historical period will set it in whatever context he has. If he has no historic context, perhaps he will use some other context as the best he has, perhaps even the contemporary period he lived in.

The Persian province Abarnahara is mentioned by name several times in the Jewish scriptures but it is always



translated to mean “beyond the river.” The river was the Euphrates and has been considered a notable boundary since ancient times. People on either side referred to the other side as Abarnahara (or Eber-nari in Assyrian). The likely start of the word Hebrew is from the Persian name for the people who lived in their province of Beyond the River. They were the Hebrews—all the people of the province not just Jews. The Hebrew language is Phoenician i.e. Canaanite. What is causing confusion is that people from the far side (Assyrian) of the Euphrates were also called Hebrews by earlier people in Canaan, so Assyrian or Aryan raiders will have been Habiru, and they might also have been Arab raiders from Beyond the Jordan (perhaps with runaways and outlaws) for all we know. So the real kernel of the word Hebrew in its present use is more recent in reality than Habiru.

That it was associated with the earlier use might be right though—deliberately by the mythologists. The Egyptians had control of Canaan until the ninth century when Omri set up a kingdom in Israel. If the Habiru were Assyrian raiders, they eventually became the Assyrian conquerors as the Assyrian kingdom built itself into an empire. So, the short-lived kingdom of Israel died when the Assyrians colonized it, whereas a couple of centuries earlier Assyrians might have been the Habiru helping to get Israel’s independence from Egypt. The native Canaanites were slaves of Egypt but they were not *in* the land of Egypt (most of them), but in their own country as an Egyptian colony.

If the Habiru were some sort of social class, they were associated with robber barons who apparently sought assistance from Beyond the River and fought the colonists. It was rather like the Maccabees later fighting the Seleucids, and the Maccabees will have seen this and expanded on the legends of David (a mythicized founder of Yehud—a different legend of foundation from that of Judah) and Solomon as they existed in what was probably an attenuated form, originally. The extension of the parallel is that the Assyrians were doubtless using the Canaanite guerillas against the Egyptians just as the Romans used the Maccabees to weaken the Greeks. So, they might have seen themselves as freedom fighters, but really they were being duped like the Maccabees, and the outcome was the same. The feeble kingdom finished up a colony of the manipulative power. The Persian “novelists” will have had sight of the Amarna letters or similar letters in the archives and could have associated their own name for the people of the satrapy with the historical name for these guerillas, but this too must have been an attenuated tale expanded later into a saga by the Egyptian Greeks.

The Hyksos have nothing to do with the Exodus. It is probably invented by Josephus trying to rationalize Jewish history, or one of his sources. The expulsion was a metaphorical one—Egypt was really expelled from Canaan. The promised land was an invention based on the “return” from “exile.” The promise of land was made by the Persians to the colonists, and was then written back into deepest history to give them a spurious entitlement. The Moses saga was mainly written in the time of the Ptolemies who supported the Jewish temple, and printed the original Septuagint.

Joshua’s conquest did not refer to the original Habiru at all. It was a romanticized allegory of the colonial conquest of Yehud, drawing upon Assyrian military tactics, but the tribal districts would have been taxation districts being given a spurious factuality in history. So, the tribes of Israel began as Persian taxation areas. If we want to talk about kernels then the kernel of the word Hebrew is the mythical ancestor Eber (Eber-niri). The genealogy can be nothing other than fictitious but is likely to show relationships between peoples rather than individuals, as is common in *Genesis*. They were not misguided. It was common Hellenistic practice and most of the genealogies will have been added to the bible in Hellenistic times.

The whole story did not fall together by chance but was deliberately concocted by the Persians using the Assyrian sources they had, and later was elaborated in Greek and Maccabean times. The final additions might have been made as late as the Herodian period.

Biblical history is not true history but a set of stories about righteous people struggling against wicked people. It is not though a saga of “Good” and “Evil” because morality is scarcely involved. The righteous people are, by definition, the people who worship Yehouah, and the unrighteous worship other gods. Nothing has changed in the last 2000 years!

## **A Summary History of Palestine**

The Jewish scriptures have totally distorted our view of ancient Palestinian history, which was far more complicated and had many more participants than just these two kingdoms. The Jewish scriptures never even explain how this territory got the name of Palestine (the land of the Philistines). Foreigners including Assyrian authors of royal annals and Herodotus knew the name of Palestine. Herodotus says Palestine is the part of Syria that is situated between Lebanon and Egypt.

The basis on which archaeologists found their theories can never be revisited. All excavations include—in Kathleen Kenyon’s words—destruction. The archaeologist destroys the evidence when it is excavated. The original archaeological situation can never be re-established. However, archaeologists continually formulate general hypotheses about the development of this geographic area in ancient times that speak against the evidence of a late written source such as the Jewish scriptures. This late source—although written—does not constitute a historical source.

Lemche explains that Palestine between, say 1250 and 900 BC is an example of this. Archaeology as well as other non-biblical information about ancient Palestine shows that Palestine in the late Bronze Age, roughly the 2nd half of the 2nd millennium BC, was an Egyptian province ruled by local princes who looked upon themselves as faithful vassals of their patron, the Pharaoh. Most of the time, Palestine was left alone. Only occasionally did the Egyptians interfere directly with the mundane problems of their colony. The constant internecine wars of the local chieftains who saw themselves as “kings” (the Egyptians called them *hazanu*, “mayors”) had a devastating effect on the wellbeing of the country. Not before the so-called “Ramesside restoration” of the Egyptian presence in Western Asia after the debacle that ended the 18th dynasty, did matters change and the Egyptian presence became more dominating. Ramesses II perhaps created a kind of “Pax Egyptiaca” in Palestine.

The Egyptians limited the devastating effects of “free-for-all” politics and created a situation of relative peace in the country that might have had a positive demographic effect as people moved from the cities to the countryside to live closer to their fields. The late 13th, the 12th and the early 11th centuries BC were witnessing the foundations of scores if not hundreds of insignificant and unprotected village settlements, not least in the mountains of Palestine. Life must have become pretty safe. From at least the 11th century BC, a certain reduction of the number of villages took place. This demographic change was counterbalanced by the rise of some settlements to fortified townships. Tel Beersheba with its circular walls and planned layout is a typical example of such a settlement that may look more like a medieval fortress than a proper city or town.

This stage may have occurred as a consequence of an at least partial Egyptian withdrawal from Palestine,

although at least in Bet Shean an Egyptian garrison remained to the beginning of the 10th century BC. Life became more dangerous and the socio-political system of the past—local patrons fighting other local patrons—emerged again. Lemche describes this as a move from one patronage society to another patronage society, from an old political system to a new system that was an exact copy of the former system. In the middle of the 9th century, some chieftains created larger political structures that eventually coalesced into the statelets of Israel and Judah, Moab, Edom, Ammon.

## Principles for Proper Research

Thomas L Thompson has offered a series of principles that ought to be agreed by scholars who want to enquire into the history of Palestine and the bible. Thompson's full lists can be seen in his paper, available online: *A view from Copenhagen: Israel and the History of Palestine*. Here is a selection showing he is being quite reasonable in what he would like to see done by everyone. Those who are sure they have God's authority behind them will disagree.

- ❑ The central principle is that biblical interpretation is a separate task from that of writing a history of pre-Hellenistic Palestine. A history of Palestine is based on direct evidence from archaeology and historical geography and is supported by anthropology, sociology and linguistics. Secondary literature, such as we find in the bible, but also in the writings of Manetho, Josephus and other authors of especially the Hellenistic period, must involve an interpretation based on our access to the world of the author. The authors' access to the past they discuss and assert must be understood. If the sources are fragmented then we have to be satisfied with a fragmented history, but one that is both correctable and falsifiable by further research.
- ❑ The bible is neither historical nor historiographical, but a secondary collection of tradition. Our earliest extant biblical books are among the Dead Sea scrolls. The secondary and collective nature of the traditions collected in biblical works allows us to speculate on earlier forms of these literary productions, and especially on the themes and ideologies which the texts comprise.
- ❑ The criterion of historicity belongs to writing history and the critical assessment of sources. A literary or theologically oriented work can rarely be attributed the historicity of historical sources. The literary or theological purposes of such texts must be considered before judging their historicity. Archaeological sources for the history of Palestine must also be used.
- ❑ The history of Palestine and of its peoples is very different from the bible's narratives, whatever political claims to the contrary may be. An independent history of Judaea during the Iron I and Iron II periods has little room for historicizing readings of the stories of *1-2 Samuel* and *1 Kings*.
- ❑ The rule of the Hyksos is an indigenous historical development within Egypt, involving a dispute over the Delta's dominance over Thebes during the so-called "second intermediate period." The historical relationships to Palestine seem to have been secondary.
- ❑ Early Bronze II, Middle Bronze II and Iron II are periods of high prosperity and a relatively dense population in Palestine while the intermediary periods of Early Bronze IV, Iron I and the Persian periods are marked by a downturn of both factors.
- ❑ The Late Bronze period inaugurates a period of stress on Palestine, eventually leading to a demographic breakdown effecting both trade and the centralization of the population in towns. Large areas of the central hill country, especially south of the Shechem area and much of Judaea, are abandoned. Throughout Palestine, there is a marked rise in the proportion and number of hamlets and small villages

beginning already in the Late Bronze period and continuing into the beginning of Iron II. Many of these settlements are in areas that had not known previous settlement. A contrasting prosperity is the mark of the Iron II period. The maintenance of the populations of the coast and the lowlands is strongly affected by Egyptian presence in the area.

- ❑ The history of Palestine comprised separate histories of different regions. Different types and history of settlement have been found for the Jezreel valley, Galilee, the highlands between Ramallah and Nablus, and the Judaeen hills. The history of these four regions from the Late Bronze period to Iron II is best written from a perspective which holds them distinct.
- ❑ The nature and development of separate and distinct populations in the regions of Iron Age Judah, Samaria and Galilee can not be integrated with assumptions of their having originated from a single people of "Israel." Moreover, our inability to identify the people of Judah and Jerusalem who went into exile after the destruction of Jerusalem with those who came from Mesopotamia and settled the area of Jerusalem in the Persian period or later is a central problem of today's history which hardly allows us to use the language of ethnicity for Palestine's population.
- ❑ Before the Persian period, "Judaism" is marked by multiplicity in social, religious and regional organization and the word should not be used as if identifying either a specific religion or people.
- ❑ The historicity of biblical narrative has not been established and should not be assumed. The potential relationship of biblical story to any historical events assumed of the world they present should follow a thorough analysis of the texts.
- ❑ The bible is a theological interpretation of the past with its own motivations apart from the historical that need to be considered in every interpretation.
- ❑ The three disciplines of Palestinian archaeology, history and biblical exegesis are independent disciplines which should not be harmonized. Each of these disciplines have their own methods and integrity. Our discourse needs to be subject to all three.
- ❑ The interpretation of the religion of Iron Age Palestine is a discipline whose sources and goals are not identical with biblical exegesis.
- ❑ Biblical studies has need for a regionally based history of Palestine based on archaeology that is independent of the bible's perspectives on the past.
- ❑ The bible is a literature reflecting ANE thought.
- ❑ "Late Biblical Hebrew" and "Classical Biblical Hebrew;" are still not properly understood or separable and cannot be on the basis of an uncertain biblical chronology.
- ❑ Iron Age inscriptions need to be analyzed within their own contexts before using them for historical syntheses.
- ❑ The importance of the literary qualities of "historical" inscriptions is rarely given its due. The discussions of the Mesha stele, of the inscription(s) from Tel Dan and of the Israel stele have led to tendentious conclusions because of the failure to attend to their literary character.
- ❑ The distinct regional settlement histories from LB to Iron II transition have generally been ignored in favour of harmonization with a biblically oriented synthesis. This has most seriously distorted our understanding of Galilee and Judah, but also the early settlement histories of the Jezreel and of the southern coastal plain.
- ❑ The recognized gaps in Jerusalem's and Judah's settlement history have not been integrated into our understanding of the past. This has particularly effected the periods from LB to Iron II.
- ❑ The effects on Palestine's history of the many deportations and transfers of population have not been integrated except where it is seen to be in agreement with biblical interpretation. Political propaganda in

our interpretation of deportation texts is inadequately considered.

- ❑ Scholars often reject the certain Hellenistic dating of the biblical texts we have in favour of a substantially earlier dating without historical warrant and independent of the texts.
- ❑ The biblical theology of monotheism has roots in the ideology of empire.
- ❑ The significant lack of an *ad quem* dating for classical biblical Hebrew and the questionable distinction of the CBH and LBH in Qumran Hebrew are not openly discussed.
- ❑ The question of ethnicity is given apologetic treatment but rarely systematically analyzed.
- ❑ The first principle of the comparative method: the separation of the analysis of data before synthesis, is ignored by archaeologists in their historical reconstruction.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 1. The Crisis of Sacred History**  
**Jerusalem & Judaism Before the Return**

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## **Faith or Myth**

Louis Rushmore reports that not long ago, the editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review* criticized belief in the infallibility of the bible, actually admitting people had been fooled by scholars and ministers in the past, and declaring it was time to stop fooling them. He wanted ministers and priests to accept inaccuracies that have always been there—the bible is not an infallible word of God. Such an admission, he said, might be impossible because ignorant “folk” insist on their bible being infallible. He must mean believers.

David Clines of Sheffield University has found that, though theology students are taught these things at college, they ignore them in their parishes and pulpits. The happy punters are simply kept in the dark. Van der Toorn, a Dutch biblical scholar, is also remarkably honest for those of his type. He says in *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies—1998* that those involved in the study of religion always have, in one way or another, a personal stake in the matter and therefore cannot be expected to set an example of dispassionate scholarly enquiry.

Doubtless he says this because the study of Israelite religion is at present racked with ill-tempered disagreement between different factions. The central difference between them is whether faith requires the bible to be upheld or not—whether the bible really depicts the forward march of God’s unfolding revelation. Otherwise the different parties are in almost total agreement! In these pages we make no apologies for taking the view that much of the bible is myth—indeed “myth” is perhaps too noble a word and “lies” would be better because, unlike myth which is intended to edify, the founders of these biblical “myths” always intended to fool people.

Most of the relevant material has been available from time immemorial and it might be surprising that these matters are not settled. They are, of course, settled for believers in Christianity and Judaism, but if belief were sufficient, we should all be still expecting Santa Claus to fall down the chimney every Christmas with his sack of goodies. Today, even more so than in the time of Celsus, those who merely believe are fools. Whatever way one imagines the Creator, we have been created with intelligence, so to turn round and say that we are not meant to exercise it in case it tests our belief is absurd—not just absurd, a blatant insult to God, if God is who created us.

As soon as it is accepted that some of the biblical material might be in error, it is necessary to decide what is. Evidence, external to the bible and its proponents, is needed and archaeology is the most objective. Biblical archaeologists at one time had as their whole *raison d’être* the aim of confirming the bible by practical research. With such a tendentious aim, they were not likely to interpret their finds objectively—nor did they! No reputable scholars deny that archaeology is the prime method of discovering facts about early Israel provided that it is not interpreted tendentiously and finds can be dated to a particular time.

The Golden Age of biblical archaeology—the period between the two World Wars—was dominated by William Foxwell Albright and his disciples—besotted biblicists to a man. A new generation of scholars in the 1960s and



early 1970s dismissed their archaeological work as simplistic. They meant “wrong”. The earlier biblical archaeologists were ridiculed for circular reasoning—assuming the biblical stories, fitting their discoveries into their framework, then claiming the discoveries proved the bible! Modern archaeologists do not think the bible is the inspired “Word of God”, basing their views on the cumulative results of a hundred years of archaeology in the Holy Land.

And that is the trouble for those “scholars” whose knees are permanently bent, and not by excessive trowelling! Even James K Hoffmeyer, a professor at Wheaton College, declares the bible wrong about almost all the early history of Israel, based on the work of these archaeologists. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua have been rejected as historical figures. The Egyptian sojourn and exodus stories, along with Sinai wanderings and Joshua’s military entry into Canaan never happened. The United Monarchy left no traces. They are simply fictional. They are myths retrojected into Israelite history by anonymous biblical writers. The *Old Testament* is superstition and folk religion.

There is no archaeological evidence for a previous temple on the site of Herod’s. In other words there is no direct evidence even of a second temple, let alone the first. Nor does *1 Kings* 6:2-36 make any note of the prominent rock—on which is now built the Dome of the Rock mosque—when it describes the first or Solomon’s temple. It seems impossible not to mention such a feature, so either the site of Solomon’s temple was different, or the whole story is fictional.

The history of Jerusalem and the inhabitants of the hill country of Palestine seems non-existent before about 700 BC, but whereas one faction sees this as evidence that much of the *Old Testament* is mythology written much later than most believers think, the other factions takes comfort in scraps of “proof”, however indirect, that the *Old Testament* accounts contain elements of true history.

## **Jerusalem**

Much of the archaeological work that has failed to support the biblical story has been carried out in Jerusalem, notably under Kathleen Kenyon. Latterly skilled Israeli excavators have been busy in Jerusalem but much of their work has been left unpublished or even has been reportedly lost through disagreements. Not a little of this dissension will be due to the archaeologists not producing what Israeli nationalists would like to see.

The oldest part of Jerusalem is the hill south of the temple area where the city of David was considered to have been, and tombs found here have been dated to 3000 BC. A small building with benches along the walls might have been an early shrine but the evidence is that the people concerned were herdsmen. Several small villages dating to about 2000 BC have been found in the valleys around Jerusalem, but no sign of occupation in the city has been found at this period.

However, about 1800 BC signs of activity appear and several parts of a city wall have been found. The trouble is that very little of the town itself remains because of subsequent building work. Nevertheless Kenyon unearthed several large storage jars taken to indicate that the town was a regional centre of trade—a market town. This deduction ties in with the source of the clay of the jars being local farms of the period that seemed to produce sufficient milk for trade, that the jars were used for, and meat. Jerusalem at this time seemed to be quite prosperous to judge by the polished stone and faience beads that have been found and the inlaid bone for

decorating furniture. It was obviously a regional centre of some wealth and importance with a population between 1000 and 2500 people.

## Egyptian References

Now a place called “Rushalimmu” has been noted on the *Execration Texts* found in Egypt and dated to this period. The *Execration Texts* were plainly some magic cursing ritual because the names of peoples, rulers and towns that the Egyptians wanted to defeat had been inscribed on to pots that had then apparently been deliberately broken. The magic is that commonly associated with names—that possession of the name gives possession of the owner of the name. This is a reason why the names of gods like that of the Hebrew god were kept secret. By forbidding anyone from uttering the name no enemies could discover the name of the god to get control of him.

The Egyptians were hoping that by breaking the names on the pots, they would facilitate the breaking of the resistance of the people, rulers or towns. Of course, there is no sure way of associating the excavated Jerusalem with Rushalimmu and, indeed, the excavated Jerusalem is hardly likely to have caused the Egyptians enough trouble to merit such a ceremony, but conceivably the excavated Jerusalem was the centre of a chiefdom and so might have been seen by the Egyptians as a potential nuisance. Unfortunately, this Jerusalem ceased to exist after a life of only about a hundred years. Perhaps Egyptian magic really worked!

About 500 years later the administrators of the Pharaohs were at the new town of Amarna busily archiving the Pharaoh’s correspondence. In the Amarna letters were six received from the scribe of the prince of “Urusalim”. If this is Jerusalem it was apparently a walled city and the assumption was that it continued the city of 1800 BC. Again, though, the excavations of Late Bronze Age Jerusalem do not bear out this deduction. There is no trace of a fortified city of this time. Not only are there no walls or towns, very few sherds of pottery can be definitely assigned to this time. There is a tomb on the Mount of Olives and traces of an Egyptian temple north of the city, but no city itself! If Jerusalem was occupied during the time of the Amarna letters, it was situated somewhere else.

Possibly, of course, the hills around Jerusalem at this period of history were all part of a chiefdom or small city state called Jerusalem. The main city itself perhaps was moved in 1800 for some reason and was still elsewhere when its scribe wrote to the Pharaoh. Since no trace of an alternative site for the town has ever been found either, a more likely solution is that the Urusalim of the Amarna letters was not a city at all but one of the Pharaoh’s country estates. Such an estate, especially in wild country, might well have been fortified. The letters mention a tribute of slaves. If the estate managers were in the habit of taking slaves locally in payment of tribute, the fortifications might have been necessary.

The real point, though, is that there is no way that archaeology supports the old idea of an ancient Jerusalem continuously occupied from the Middle Bronze Age. The possible appearance of Jerusalem in Bronze Age documents must refer to the district rather than a specific city. Scholars of all persuasions now recognize that the culture of the Judaeian hills was continuous from the Late Bronze Ages to the Early Iron Age, precluding any foreign invasion or infiltration, and it was a culture based on smallholdings and villages living by husbandry and organized on the basis of kin. All scholars see these people as partial bandits raiding the civilized valleys but otherwise sharing the culture of the region including practices that later would be condemned.

## United Monarchy and After

In the couple of hundred years preceding the supposed kingdom of David, Jerusalem was, in the bible, the city of the Jebusites, a small but well fortified town that David decided could be his capital. Besides the bible there is no historical evidence for this belief and the archaeological work is equally negative. Kenyon found successive built terraces of some size, but no city walls, no signs of occupation and no buildings that might have been public buildings. The Iron Age date of the excavation is certain from a complete jar found on the floor of the site and other sherds. Margreet Steiner judges the terraces to be part of a fortification, but for what purpose? It is the only fortification in the hill country in that period. Nothing suggests it is an Egyptian fort, and, indeed, everything suggests it is local, but perhaps the Egyptians made the locals build a watch tower, or the locals built one to watch for the Egyptians!

Iron Age II is the designation of the period when the United Monarchy of David and Solomon ruled the Levant in a powerful empire. In fact, several buildings large enough to have been administrative buildings are dated to the period but no pottery considered previously to have been typical of David and Solomon is found there! However, a large rampart has been found thought by some to be the “millo” mentioned in the bible. Others date it to the earlier period. Several unused or discarded parts of buildings have also been found and some have reliably been dated on style to the ninth century. Interestingly a bronze fist was discovered that seems likely to have been part of a statue of a god.

All of these are exciting finds, especially for those who want to see David and Solomon emerge into history, but the city seems to have had no population—there is no evidence of occupation—no houses! The buildings and fortifications are all high on the hill with no space for dwellings above and no sign of them below. In the Middle Bronze Age occupation and the later permanent occupation from the seventh century onwards, the walls were lower down so that dwellings behind were protected. Possibly the domestic part of the city was further north, but nothing has been found of it. What has been found here dates from a century later.

So, the Jerusalem of David was a small apparently administrative centre with no attached domestic quarter. No more than 2000 people could have lived within and presumably were administrators and those who serviced them. It must have been an administrative centre for a statelet but could not have been the capital of a state such as that of Solomon.

Other cities of the same type have been excavated from the tenth and ninth centuries like Gezer, Hazor, Lachish and Megiddo, all with apparently public buildings and few dwellings but grander ones than Jerusalem. They also suggest small city states that functioned mainly as administrative centres for a rural locality. Jerusalem, not a very significant settlement, not a very elaborate one, indeed barely more than a village in the tenth century, was, in the bible, the capital of a United Monarchy extending over the northern part of the country to the Euphrates. Yet the grand buildings, the palaces, were at Megiddo not in Jerusalem.

No trace has been found of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem and the United Monarchy has to be rejected as not historical. The earliest date for a temple in Jerusalem is the 700s BC when the city finally became established as the centre of a small state. Ritual baths are never found before the Babylonian conquest, unless a single example has been found at Tel Masos. This must be another surprising fact. In late Judaism, ritual baths were

an essential part of pious living, yet they were not needed earlier, and baths are substantial structures that cannot be easily hidden, and do not easily crumble. It does not suggest continuity of religious practice.

On the eastern slopes of the “City of David”, naturally outside its fortifications, houses for artisans and small traders at last appeared in the ninth century BC. The buildings were small and simple and were plainly not the homes of nobility. However, tombs found cut in rocks dating roughly 850 to 650 BC show that people were getting rich and one tomb is a fine multi-chambered mausoleum. A simple blessing like that of *Numbers* 6.24-26 has been found on silver funereal plaques from a tomb at Ketef Hinnom. Pottery and Jewellery show the tomb is later than the seventh century.

The destruction of the city by the Babylonians in 586 BC left a mass of debris that has yielded sufficient for life in the city just before its destruction to be reconstructed. It had grown enormously in about a hundred or so years and could have reached a population of 10,000. Substantial walls had been built in about 700 BC and the water system was sophisticated. In contrast to the earlier city, no public buildings are found but many residential buildings, some obviously of wealthy families able to import luxuries from Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Greece and Cyprus.

The attack by the Assyrians had the effect of destroying most of the small towns that had earlier rivalled Jerusalem. The Assyrians therefore left Jerusalem as an unrivalled buffer city enabling it to prosper out of the misfortune of the others. There must have been a quid pro quo for this favourable treatment and whatever it was the victorious Babylonians a hundred years later did not appreciate it, but the Persians a half a century further on did. The Jews were eminent for their loyalty to the Persians, remaining steadfast to the “Great King” and regaining their prosperity as a consequence. Though the Assyrians are depicted as wolves in the scriptures, the inhabitants of Jerusalem obviously reached an accord with them and prospered as a result when all their rivals were destroyed.

## Religious History

So what was the religion of the Jews before they were exiled and “returned” with a more sophisticated religion? Formerly, believers, not least among them professional biblical scholars, saw history as the evidence of God’s progressive revelation as declared in the bible. Perhaps the sense that the earlier optimism was misplaced led to a backlash against history and a religious inclination towards biblical theology—religious interpretation of the mythology to find its theological importance vis-a-vis God’s revelation. All formal religion was idolatrous and true religion came only as a personal revelation of God. Religious history was therefore irrelevant.

Latterly, the importance of history has returned but with a great deal more skepticism about revelation and a great deal more emphasis on history—what ordinary people, women and families were doing, considering where the Goddess had gone and seeking corroboration from different sources. Standard texts had concentrated on orthodoxy’s definition of acceptable religion that had expunged whole areas of religious evolution that were considered unimportant or even embarrassing.

Christians see the pure worship of God in pre-exilic times when the strange figures of God’s prophets were thought of as warning His people of their false steps. After the exile the Jews were thought to have got caught up in an excessive legalism that took all the spark out of God’s revelation. Jews, of course, saw it quite

differently—the prophets warned the Jews against straying from God's laws, so they applied them with firmness. The seed of Abraham knew there was only one god from about two millennia BC, according to the clerics, and Christian clerics tell us that the Chosen People were truer to God's wishes from then until they returned from Babylon. This then is an important period for study, especially for Christians. What though is found? The evidence suggests that Israelites worshipped their ancestors and "local" gods, not any universal god!

## **Dead Ancestors and Local Cults**

The local god and the local ruler were, for the Semites, each a "melek" (their ruler, a king), a "baal" (their owner, a Lord). The human ruler and the local god were essentially one, an impression the Persians were to use. Often, the ruling dynasty descended from a god or hero, making the king divine, just as the emperor-cult of Rome dominated army and province, and welded the aristocracy and the masses.

Though a few disagree, most students now see the cult of dead ancestors as an important part of the Israelite religion before the exile. Dead ancestors had divine qualities and were called "elohim"—divine beings. The family estate was passed down by the ancestors and so families were more or less wealthy depending upon their ancestors' endeavours. For this they had to be honoured whatever level the family began at. Even slaves became members of their master's family. Families kept little statuettes—terephim—that stood for their elohim or "gods" and who represented the family's identity and fortunes. Rights of passage involved ceremonies of presentation of family members to the terephim for recognition and approval.

Besides the cult of ancestors, successful families also had a cult of a founding "father" as a god. Plainly this was an extension of ancestor worship into a personal god of the family handed down by the father—the head of the household. By the early part of the final millennium BC, large clans had turned their family god into a localized cult with local shrines or temples. Generally he was called "Baal" meaning "Lord" because the senior member of a family is always addressed as Lord by his descendants, but he also had a toponym, a place name, or a clan name. Baal-Peor, the name of a Moabite god, was one such toponymic name.

The names of Yehouah were similarly distinguished as excavators at Kuntillet Ajrud found in 1976 when they found references to Yehouah-Samaria and Yehouah-Teman. Just as Baal was not a single god, Yehouah was not a single god but a set of regional gods. Yehouah seems to mean "He Lives" or "He Is", rendered for scriptural purposes as "I Am". Thus the God of the Christians and the Jews is always called "The *Living God*".

It seems he was originally a god of life or existence, a god who brought things into life, and therefore of fertility as scholars have long thought. Transferring the creation of everything to him when he displaced El as the creator was therefore easy. To his worshippers he was the "Lord of Existence".

In any event the plurality of Baals was matched by the multiplicity of Yehouahs. There is good circumstantial evidence for a Yehouah-Hebron and a Yehouah-Zion. The sponsors of the cult of the temple at Jerusalem wanted to gather all of the local Yehouahs into one, whence their slogan:

Hear, O Israel: Yehouah is one Yehouah (*Dt 6:4*),

which plainly shows that there was a multiplicity of Yehouahs, but it is not the message the clerics want to tell

their monotheistic flocks, and so is deliberately mistranslated as:

Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord.

The Moabite Stone illuminates our ideas of pre-Persian Israelite beliefs. In the bible, the Moabites and Ammonites were kinsmen of the Israelites, and the Moabite Stone shows they had the same language. Though their gods had different names, the two peoples shared similar beliefs. The national god of Israel and Moab, who controlled national affairs, was each shown as an angry tyrant to be obeyed and mollified. Chemosh, the god of Moab, ruled directly according to Mesha who did what the god told him to do. Moab was oppressed by Israel because Chemosh was angry at his people, and Moab prospered because Chemosh dwelt with his people. Substitute Yehouah for Chemosh and the bible appears. Chemosh ordered Mesha, "Go, take Nebo from Israel!" just as Yehouah ordered Joshua to take Ai (*Josh* 8:1).

Both the Israelites and Moab used the "ban", or vow in warfare. The king would make a vow to kill the entire population of an enemy city, vowing also treasure for the god. Now the king had to enforce the vow. In *Joshua* 6:17-21, Joshua put Jericho under the ban and ended massacring them all, "men and women, young and old, even the oxen and sheep and donkeys". Saul failed to fulfil a "ban" by sparing the choice sheep and cattle, leading to his downfall. Jephthah vowed his daughter to Yehouah (*Jg* 11:30-40) and also could not avoid the outcome.

Mesha built houses such as the "house of Baal-Meon", a common element in Canaanite place names, apparently as the place of a shrine to a deity.

### **Yehouah as the Dying God Baal**

The Persian colonists seemed to have expunged any inscriptional signs of Yehouah as a nature god, and made any reversion to it an apostasy against the proper god, Yehouah. Even so, there still are poetical references to the storm god, Yehouah, and the sun god, Yehouah, in the poetical sections of the bible. Garbini points to the struggle with a sea monster called Rahab or Leviathan. (*Ps* 74, 79; *Isa* 27; 51; *Job* 40-41). Elsewhere Phoenician elements occur as in *Psalms* 104, a cosmogony from Tyre relating to the god Elqunirs. Part too of the story of Esau and Jacob (*Gen* 27) seem identifiable in the work of Philo of Byblos on the origins of Tyre. One could hazard a guess that, if we ever found details of the mythology of the Phoenicians, much more of the Jewish scriptures would be found in it. Fragmentary Phoenician texts written in Greek in the Hellenistic period show what Phoenician history must have been like. Mochus, Philo of Byblos and the *Annals of Tyre* show literature that could have been used as a model, if not a source, of parts of the Hebrew bible. The histories of Phoenicia written by Philo of Byblos and Mochus began with a cosmogony just as the Hebrew bible does. Already, allusions in the *Song of Deborah* and *Psalms* 29 have been found in the Ugaritic tablets.

Ras Shamra is the modern name of the ancient city Ugarit, discovered by accident in 1928 on the coast of Syria in what was once Phœnicia. In May 1929, archaeologists uncovered the clay tablets bearing cuneiform writing, unusually written in a cuneiform alphabet of 30 characters. From the summer of 1930, the Ras Shamra cuneiform was decoded. The language of the script, called Ugaritic, was a Northwest Semitic language, closely related to Phoenician and Hebrew but preceding them.



In the scriptures initiated by the school of Ezra, Baal is an idolatrous god and sometimes a rival to Yehouah for the attention of the Israelites. In Elijah's dispute with Baal's prophets on Mount Carmel (1 Kg 18), Yehouah—not Baal—proved to be the controller of rain and storm, or lightning which “fell as fire”. Yet, the Ras Shamra tablets associate Baal with rain, storm, and fertility, and proclaim him as “Haddu, lord of the Stormcloud”. Through rain, Baal provided fertile ground which produced crops on which both animals and men depended. Baal's worshippers sought to maintain his supremacy so that their life-sustaining crops could continue.

Scholars noted parallels between the Ugaritic texts and the Hebrew Bible, suggesting the Israelite religion was an adaptation of Pagan religious myths and practises to worship of Yehouah. Early agricultural societies were polytheistic. They had a pantheon of gods with different functions, although they often had a high god above them all. The main function of agricultural gods was to keep the land fertile, and many of the rites of these gods were sexual. This manifests itself in the Jewish scriptures where the opponents of the Israelites are shown as fornicating with their gods, and the same type of abuse is applied to the supposedly apostate Israelites who follow the same practices. It shows that the Canaanite religion was what could have been expected in that kind of society. Yet the monotheistic worship of Yehouah was imposed on to the formerly polytheistic people.

So, the bible speaks of “sons of El”, “sons of God”, one of whom is Yehouah. The bible itself has evidence that Yehouah was worshipped by non-Israelites, though biblicists can usually find reasons that they really were. Even the admired scholar Martin Noth defends this:

In no case is the name Yehouah to be encountered outside and independently of Israel. So the tradition of the book of *Exodus* could be right, namely that the divine name Yehouah arose for the first time in Israel, or better for the first time with the people of Israel, and therefore in some way goes back to the work of Moses.

In the land of the blind the one eyed man should be king, but Christians will not even open a single eye to the evidence:

- ❑ The ark drawn by the Philistine cows ends up in a field of a Canaanite from Beth Shemesh, but he has a theophoric name in Yehouah—Joshua (1 Sam 6:14,18). Names which incorporate the name of a God implies worship of him. Yeho, Yo, and Yah are Yehouah appearing in names and imply worship of Him, but this man was not an Israelite, he was a Canaanite!
- ❑ The son of the king of Hamath, an Aramaean kingdom north of Israel, is Joram (2 Sam 8:10). Biblicists with their usual reverence for the ineptitude of the Holy Ghost say it is an error for Hadoram—theophoric in Hadad.
- ❑ Jochabed is Moses's mother (Ex 6:20, Num 26:59), so she anticipated God's revelation to the prophet.
- ❑ Yaubidi was the Aramaean king of Hamath known from the annals of Sargon II. Though he is plainly an Aramaean king of an Aramaean country, Noth makes his theory perfectly valid by declaring this king to have been an Israelite!
- ❑ Names in the tablets of Mari and other Syrian cities of the eighteenth century BC have theophoric elements “yahwi”, “yawī” and “ya”. These are plainly enough theophoric references to Yehouah, supposed to be exclusive to the Israelites in the theories of biblicists like Noth. Biblicists of the Albright school continued the pretence, but “The name of my son is Yaw”, appeared on a fragment from Ugarit. Needless to say, biblicists began to find ingenious ways of denying what is obvious—Yehouah was a god

of the Ugaritic people long before Moses. Even a Catholic scholar, Abbé H. Cazelles protests that “yaw” at Ugarit has been “challenged without reason”. More absurd still is that no one doubts that the god “Ieuo” was worshipped at nearby Berytus as Porphyry testifies and Eusebius was happy to accept.

- ❑ “Ya” and its variants are also found in the Ebla tablets, even having a divine determinative. G Pettinato deciphers a sign found commonly on the Ebla tablets as “ia” (“ya”), and, though most experts read it also as “i”, “li” and “ni”, biblicists have begun to treat third millennium Syria as evidence of the bible, ignoring in their typical fashion, the actual bible and all previous opinion. Suddenly the Biblicists were glad to accept this “ya” as justification for the biblical cycle of Abraham myths. Abraham found himself wandering around Syria a thousand years earlier than he had been, and Moses became suddenly an embarrassment! It does not work. A widespread regional god could not at the same time have been the exclusive god of one patriarch and his family.

There is no doubt that “yau” was a god of the local Syrian pantheon towards the beginning of the second millennium, worshipped by both nomads and the sedentary population. That Yehouah was a god of the pantheon of the Levant back into time contradicts the Mosaic legend that it was brought by him from Egypt. This pre-Israelite god became the exclusive God of the Israelites but it is certain that it did not happen as the bible says it did. Yehouah was a god of the people that the Israelites supposedly converted long before they arrived in the Mosaic myth.

*Psalms* 29 has been extensively analysed in comparative studies of the Hebrew and Ugaritic texts. A Canaanite origin of this psalm as a Pagan hymn to the storm-god, Baal, later adapted to the worship of Yehouah, had been surmised. Baal is the storm-god, sending lightning with thunder, his holy voice, causing his enemies to quake. Baal’s voice “convulses the earth” and causes the “mountains to quake”. In the Ugaritic tablets, Baal’s palace was made of trees from Lebanon. *Psalms* 29 also speaks of the cedars of Lebanon and Sirion (29:6):

From Sirion its precious cedars.

The psalmist tells us Yehouah’s voice had a similar effect on the Earth as that attributed to Baal (29:3-5,7-9): Yehouah’s voice “breaks the cedars” (29:5), “shakes the wilderness” (29:8) and “strips the forests bare” (29:9). Since Yehouah is depicted as a neurotically jealous god, it is not possible for a psalm to Baal to have been transferred to Yehouah. The Israelites must actually have been worshipping Baal under the name of Yehouah. The scriptures admit (*Jg* 3:7) that the Israelites worshipped Baal when they had occupied Canaan. This admission is a slip of the “second” temple priesthood who had written the scriptures. The priests had set up a temple in Jerusalem at the behest of the Persian king, so that all Hebrews—the people of Abarnahara—would worship one god. The reward for the priests was to get rich quick, and for the Persians to raise revenue and unite a mixed people into the common culture of Persia. So the scriptures were written as a polemic against older gods—the gods the Israelites had worshipped before the colonists were sent. This oversight shows the reality but a critical examination of the Jewish scriptures does not suggest any ancient Israelite allegiance to an almighty transcendental god.

Christians, who are troubled by this, desperately point out that the Ugaritic texts are not “exactly” the same as *Psalms* 29. One wonders how they can be exactly the same when they are in different languages written in different scripts. The psalmist might have modified a Canaanite hymn essentially by replacing the name Baal with the personal name of the Jewish God. That other changes occurred in translation and subsequently seems

obvious and unavoidable, but to pretend that the two hymns are independent because they are not “fully alike”, is typically Christian.

They add that the bible can say what it likes as the word of God and whatever it says implies no dependence on Baal worship or anything else Pagan. Here is an even funnier joke:

The *Old Testament* was intended also for the gentile world, it is but natural that the biblical authors availed themselves of figures of speech and imagery with which also Israel's neighbours were familiar, or which were at least easily understandable to them

“Familiar figures and literary style would facilitate gentiles' understanding of the truth”. Note how these bizarre Christian kooks think the ancient Jewish priests were writing for gentiles and that they were writing the truth! This is only true in the sense that the Hebrews were not all Israelites. They included Phoenicians, Levantine Canaanites, Aramaeans and the residue of Hittites and other older invaders as well as the influxing Arabs. Hebrew was their language and script, not just that of the Israelites.

Anyway, in typical Christian polemical style, having argued that there is no link at all between these ancient texts and the Hebrew bible, they then give it all away, hoping that you will not notice because you are as thick and uncomprehending as the average bird-brained believer, by adding that:

The existence of these similarities argues eloquently for the bible's integrity.

And these similarities...

...provide one of the chief evidences that the bulk of the Psalms were not written after the Babylonian exile. Their language fits that used by Israel's neighbours in the very time our Hebrew Bible says the Psalms were written.

So these similarities, rather than militating against the bible's credibility, buttress its integrity. What was denied as being dependent or even connected suddenly proves to be a virtue.

They can, if they wish, believe that black is white and the earth is flat, but intelligent people do not believe either. Nor do they believe that the bible appeared perfectly formed at God's bidding. Rational people reject this nonsense. Of course, Christianity has never been rational, which is probably the reason Christians want us all to be like them. Christians blindly claim:

- ☐ the bible's ethical and spiritual concepts are unparalleled by Pagan sacred literature;
- ☐ the gods of Pagan myths are guilty of degenerate behaviour of all sorts;
- ☐ Yehouah is infinite in purity;
- ☐ Pagans constantly had to pacify their angry gods.

On wonders whether these people ever actually read the Jewish scriptures. They seem to use them simply to dig out some authoritative quotation to suit whatever they are saying. Try reading your *Old Testament* and tell us then that this syncretistic god, Yehouah, is free of degenerate behaviour, practises unparalleled ethical

concepts, is infinitely pure and does not have to be pacified. If they cannot see that the bits of the scriptures that they like are not precisely the sycophantic writings of fearful and superstitious men, eager to pacify the most monstrous ogre that ever got a billion people worshipping him, then they are not only blind but insane.

Aliyan Baal's supposed death and resurrection has big holes in it at the crucial points, according to Christian apologists. Yet, the text says "Baal is reported to have died" after descending to the underworld. There he is "as dead". Anat recovers his corpse and buries it. Later El sees in a dream that Baal yet lives. After another gap, Baal is in a battle. What is missing? Baal is reported to have died and is described as dead yet he reappears fighting a battle. Meantime, he must have been revived.

Baal's other form, Hadad, is apparently even less prone to dying because he just sinks into a bog for seven years. When he emerges, blighted nature renews itself. There is no suggestion of death and resurrection and no hint of ritual re-enactment of the myth. Christians who believe this should look at *Zechariah* 12:11, where Hadad-Rimmon is inconsolably mourned. It is not post-Christian and they can only be mourning his death. If the nit-picking Christians deny that seven years in a bog is death, then let us not disagree. But the difference is merely a variation on a theme. The Nag Hammadi and other Gnostic texts vary as to whether the Redeemer took on flesh. Some deny it, others accept it. Some have a fleshly body but an apparent death. Others a real death, but only of the human Jesus, merely a shroud of flesh discarded once the Saviour chose to show his spiritual self. These are variations on a common theme. Christians do not believe them but they stem from the same sources as Christianity.

## **The Hebrew Goddess**

Both textual and archaeological information testifies to the presence in the religion of the Israelites at least before the exile of a Goddess—Anat or Asherah—as a consort of Yehouah. Papyri found at the Jewish Egyptian centre at Elephantine include an oath of Anat-Yeho or Anat-Bethel, Bethel ("House of El") being a standing stone at the Elephantine sanctuary used as a cult symbol for Yehouah. A standing stone universally is a phallic symbol, so the "House of El" was his son, Yehouah, and Anat was the consort of both El and Yehouah! Anat-Yeho is the "Queen of Heaven" who is defended by her worshippers (Jer 7:18; 44:17-19; 44:25) as superior to the god, Yehouah, doubtless the Yehouah imported by the Persian "returners" from exile.

Archaeologists have also found Hebrew inscriptions at Kirbet el-Qom in the Judaean hills that speak of "Yehouah and his Asherah". Asherah is also linked with Yehouah-Teman and Yehouah-Samaria in blessings inscribed at Kuntilla Ajrud in Sinai. Mesha of Moab also refers to an apparently dual god named "Ashtar-Chemosh". Ashtar must have been a variant of Ishtar. Asherah was a Mother-Goddess known from the Canaanite Ras Shamra tablets. The "returners" were keen to be rid of images of the Asherim, phallic poles or pillars probably surmounted with an image and Deuteronomy 12:3 orders their destruction. 1 Kings 18:19 and 2 Kings 21:7 prove that Israelites worshipped this goddess in both of the kingdoms of the Yehudim. Micah reiterates Deuteronomy in having Yehouah promise to destroy those who do not destroy these Asherim. Whether Ashera, when it occurs in the bible, refers to the goddess or to phallic pillars, the "returners" wanted to be shot of them, much to the annoyance of the Am ha-Eretz and their wives who, over the centuries, had grown fond of them.

It is this popular veneration of the goddess in her phallic form that explains the many cult fertility figurines found

in Palestine but rarely spoken about—the pillar figurines. They are probably models of sanctuary images sold to worshippers for personal devotional purposes. The Astarte Plaques are low reliefs of the goddess often surrounded by a frame probably meant to be the recess containing the cult image in the sanctuary. The Astarte Plaques therefore depict the goddess in the context of her shrine.

## Icons

Religious imagery was an important aspect of identifying monarch, god and people. It only changed when the Persians came into world power with an aniconic god—the first of them. The Persians doubtless found it advantageous that they had no image of their god, because it was then easier to impose him without anyone noticing. A god who is not pictured is not an obviously different god!

Scholars of the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, have chosen to examine the many icons and images that have been found in Palestine with a view to providing a basis for understanding Israelite religion independently of the tendentious hagiography called the scriptures. No one is suggesting that the biblical writings can be thrown away. Even though they are much later compilations than most of the faithful have been led to believe, they still contain fragments of much earlier work and so can still be valuable historical information. The difference is that whereas the scriptures were formerly accepted as the standard, they no longer are. The hints at religious practice deducible from icons is likely to be a sounder yardstick and biblical information will have to fit in with the archaeological work, not the other way around.

Doubtless the modern interest in images rather than words is related to the ease with which we communicate with images in the modern world of TV, cinema and computers. The earlier obsession with documented religion led to Protestant scholars particularly looking down on religions for which there was no such documentation. Religions of the “book” had been seen as having progressed beyond the primitive religions of mere sacerdotal ritual. The modern view is that images can be as valuable as text.

The religions of the Hebrew God were thought of as being free of images because this advanced god could not be pictured. Images of goddesses were found in Israel but not images of Yehouah, a strange and illogical imbalance. If the god could have a consort, both must have been visible. The standing stones were symbolic of the god but there seemed not to have been any recognisable images of Him. The *Calf of Samaria* of *Hosea* 8:6, apparently the image of a bull in the temple of Bethel, has been apologized for as the pedestal supporting... nothing! Or an image of the invisible god, if you like!

In fact, of course, the prohibition of graven images in the bible is late. There are no identifiable images of Yehouah, the Persian religion forbidding representation of the God of Heaven. The incident of the “Golden Calves” (“These be thy gods, O Israel”) in *Exodus* 32:4 is a legend written in justification of it, but proving that image worship had occurred. Both the original *Deuteronomy* 5:8 and *Exodus* 20:4 also forbid the making of images of anything in heaven, on earth or in the sea. Despite this, images of the Canaanite gods from the earlier phase are found. So, if this was an ancient prohibition, as believers think, it was never followed, although art work does not seem to have been highly valued in these countries to judge by their quality, unless it was simply a sign of their poverty.

The Norwegian scholar, Mowinckel, in the early part of the twentieth century was already telling people who

wanted to listen that the Jewish proscription of images was late and that the temple of Jerusalem for long had an image of Yehouah in some form. More recently a number of scholars have pointed out that references to the appearance of God in psalms such as *Psalms 27:4*,

One thing have I desired of Yehouah, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of Yehouah all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of Yehouah, and to inquire in his temple,

imply that somewhere was a fine image of God to be seen! Here the implication is clear that the “beauty of Yehouah” is to be beheld in the temple, the “House of the Yehouah”. Cult statues of Yehouah must have been erected in the various sanctuaries. What signs there are of adoration of gods suggest they were local ones—Yehoauh of Samaria, Yehouah of Temen, “to the god who is in Dan” (a Greek inscription), as well as the place names suggestive of a local shrine such as Bethel, the House of El. The many towns called “Beth-something” in the bible must have been sites of sanctuaries to Yehouah or some other Baal. Only the “House” of a god is going to be remembered as a notable place. Evidently statues to Yehouah were present in the temples of Jerusalem, Samaria and Bethel. The capping evidence, that cannot be denied, is that Assyrian documents refer to cult images of the Israelites.

The favoured image of the old Canaanite Yehouah seems to have been a bull or a calf, and it seems at least likely that some of the earlier colonists from Persia saw nothing wrong in depicting Yehouah thus, probably because the Persians themselves revered their cattle and favoured them as sacrifices. Bull figurines have been found. Seated figures, gods or kings, smiting gods, animals and animal head's, sphinxes, plamate trees, and lotus plants of Egyptian style are found but not a whisker of the splendour of Solomon. Jeroboam I in particular might be a legend based on such images being set up by an early colonist.

Israelite religion had, from beginning to end, much in common with Canaanite religion or even depended on Canaanite models.

B S J Isserlin, *The Israelites*

Images were commonplace in the Canaanite religion as they were in others of the time. Ahab made an asherah (1 Kg 16:33). Maacah's “abominable image” (1 Kg 15:13) was an asherah. Good king Hezekiah cut down an asherah set up in the temple (2 Kg 18:4), but bad king Manasseh replaced it (2 Kg 21:3,7), only for good king Josiah to chop it down again, and a lot of other asherim beside (2 Kg 23:6,14). Even Moses set up a bronze serpent (Num 21:8-9).

All of these images will have been of Canaanite deities, the Israelites being themselves, of course, no less Canaanite than a New Yorker is an American. The Israelites were Canaanites. It is the Jewish religion that differed from Canaanite models even though the Jewish god had a Canaanite god's name. The model was Persian Zoroastrianism, but the convergence of the two ended with the defeat of Persia and the destruction of the power of the Magi by Alexander.

## **The Bull Cult**

Now despite all this religious imagery which ties in perfectly well with what we know of the history of the region, the Israelites had been told almost a millennium before by their great and revered leader, Moses, according to



Jewish mythology, not to make images of their aniconic god, Yehouah, and he had destroyed images that his own brother had made in error. As mentioned above, he brought down from a mountain, where Yehouah seemed to live in those days, tablets with the rule clearly inscribed on it, among others:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

The bible has Moses making this clear when he first was handed the tablets (*Ex 20:4*), and later when he made his last speech summarizing their adventures before he departed this world (*Dt 5:8*). Both of these events he wrote down in full in his own works, supposedly the five books in which these two appear called the *Pentateuch* or *Torah*. These constitute the Jewish law of God that was held sacrosanct from then until today, except that the bible spends most of its time saying that no Jews took any notice of them until Ezra a Persian official told them to in the fifth century BC, 900 years after Moses had died. Some will say it was really good king Josiah who reintroduced the law of Moses when it had been forgotten, in which case it had been forgotten again a second time, because the bible is certain that Ezra had to read out the law again!

It is a matter of social bonding for Jews to believe this, and, for Christians, it is even a matter of the salvation of their immortal souls, so a lot of people *do* believe it, even though it is utterly unbelievable. Such is the power of religion. The original law might have been the curse on graven and cast images presented in *Deuteronomy 27:15*, as being called out along with other curses by the Levites, the Jewish Magi.

The law was taken to mean images of the god were forbidden but not other cult images such as the decorated ark, the cherubs and the menorah, seven branched lampstand. The biblical descriptions of Solomon's temple include many more images such as the twelve bronze bulls that supported the molten sea, the cherubs, lions and bulls supporting basin stands, palms and pomegranates. J Gutmann surveyed all the evidence and deduced that Judaism was never against all imagery. What was forbidden were representations of the god only. Cherubim did not stand for the god but only what supported him, so were not forbidden. Images of animals might have been controversial, some saying they did not stand for the god but only symbolized him, while others thought they could only be considered as representing the god and that was forbidden.

It is not true as some have said that images are not found in the archaeology of Israel. Female images of a crude kind but evidently cult objects are extremely common. Broken pieces of more substantial statues are also sometimes found, though rarely. This evidence is not evidence of a long time deep seated aversion to imagery but evidence of a culturally deserted place in which the making of images was at some stage suppressed, so that those that were made were destroyed leaving only fragments.

The Persians did not picture Ahuramazda except as a symbol of a winged figure emerging from a winged circlet



**Evidence for Solomon's  
Temple is fake**

or disc. They must have seen this picture as only symbolizing the god, or was a picture of something associated with the god, but not the god himself such as his fravashi.

Yehouah in Canaan was a bull or a calf. The scriptural evidence is oblique at best but it is unmistakeably there suggesting that editors have tried to disguise it over the years. If it were not there more obviously at first, it is hard to see why it is there at all, oblique though it may be. Jeroboam, Aaron and the golden calf, Yehouah described in Balaam's oracles as being "like the horns of a wild ox", the imagery also being associated with the exodus, Yehouah answering from the horns of an ox in *Psalms* 22 when correctly translated, the twelve bulls of the flaming dish of Solomon's temple, the heads of calves modelled above Solomon's throne (1 *Kg* 10:19) when "round behind" is correctly translated.

The god of the fathers called the "Mighty One of Jacob" appears five times in the scriptures (*Gen* 49:24; *Isa* 49:26; 60:16; *Ps* 132:2; 5) but the name is an outrageous mistranslation of the "Bull of Jacob". The same word is a bull in *Isaiah* 10:13, 34:7, *Psalms* 50:13, and *Psalms* 68:31(30). So, the god of the fathers, or one of them, was the Bull of Jacob. Jacob traditions in *Genesis* seem to center on Bethel (*Gen* 28:10-22; 35:1-15) where the god was apparently worshipped as a bull. In *Judges* 20:28, Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron of the golden calves, ministers before the ark at Bethel. Jeroboam had identified his calf images with the "god who brought you up out of Egypt"—Yehouah, and should there have been any doubt Aaron, having made the golden calf, declares, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to Yehouah", although Yehouah is mistranslated "Lord" therefore seemingly just any old lord god, including a cow!

The modest deduction of some scholars is that Moses and Aaron were associated with a calf or bull cult. Ahuramazda, the name of the god of heaven of the Persians, seems to contain the names of both Aaron and Moses, a curious coincidence, unless it is not one. The Persians sacrificed cattle and held them in esteem as the epitome of the Good Creation among animals. The ox-soul was the soul of all being and the sacrifice of the primeval bull set the world in motion. But, though the Persians had a high regard for their cattle, they never made them into gods, unlike the Iranians who went on to India. The later Persian goddess, Anahita was associated with a bull sacrifice, was confused with Mithras by Herodotus, and Mithras was associated with a bull sacrifice in the Roman cult of Mithras. With all this background relating the new Persian influenced god of Yehud to cattle, perhaps it is not surprising that some of the settlers thought it was an ox cult, and since that would fit in nicely with some of the Canaanite cult, they thought it would make their task of conversion, or rather adaptation, easier. Evidently later settlers did not like the direction that had been taken.

Hosea, whose name means salvation, argues against bull imagery (*Hos* 8:1-6; 10:1-6; 13:1-3) and he condemns altars, pillars and shrines, sounding much more orthodox Persian than Aaron. It seems that a backlash left Aaron carrying the can for the golden calf but it did not harm his standing with Moses although it led to the elevation of the Levites and the murder of many otherwise innocent people in the myth. Moses has been lifted out as politically correct, but the guilty party remaining already has a myth behind him, so remains unpunished. Any erroneous bull imagery had now to be removed. Ahaz removed the bronze bulls from the molten sea before Solomon's temple, but he was not known as a reforming king. He was obliged to remove the precious metal to melt it down to pay the tribute demanded by the Assyrians. (2 *Kg* 16:17). Hezekiah and Josiah were equally discomforted, no doubt.

In the legends, the destruction of the divine images by these kings was their own choice, a supposed deliberate

return to wrongly abandoned practices contrary to aniconism. In fact they were probably obliged to continue what Ahaz had had to do, namely use whatever could be found to pay off the suzerain. Later, the absence of images out of political necessity was made into a virtue by the Deuteronomistic Historian who pretended that the kings had already introduced the “return” to aniconism that the Persian priests were insisting upon. The propaganda of the Deuteronomistic Historian was that the Persian colonists were not doing anything unusual. Yehouah was not supposed to be pictured and some of the last kings before the Babylonian conquest had realized it.

## **Israelite and Canaanite Religion**

Biblical theology required the religion of the Israelites, sponsored, as it was, by God himself, to be vastly different—superior no less—to the religion of the other inhabitants of the Levant. The clerics therefore made a point of emphasising any difference they thought they saw between Israelitish religion and that of their contemporaries and compatriots, the Canaanites. Now a panther might be black all over but it is still in every other respect a leopard! To emphasize its different colour from other leopards is to miss every aspect of its true nature. Latterly, the fashion among biblical scholars has been precisely to examine the similarities between Israelitish religion and that of the Canaanites. Only the balance of similarities and differences can fairly suggest whether “God’s religion” was different in the beginning from Pagan religions.

Now according to the Holy Book, in *Deuteronomy*, God wants His Chosen People to enter Canaan and wipe out the native people living there as idolaters. The native people would be eradicated and their idolatry would be expunged. This was, of course, a wish of the Maccabees—a thousand years—later who felt themselves threatened by the Greeks and was never a wish of any native Israelites who amicably shared the land with their Canaanite brothers. That, the Hellenized writers considered, was the trouble. The Israelites did not wipe out all other competing religions, but they should have done. Accordingly they put the warning into the scriptures. The temptations of Baal were made to represent the temptations of Zeus and Apollo and the philosophy of Plato, all the pertinent problems for Judaism at the time the scriptures were set down.

Yet an archaeologist (W F Albright) besotted by biblical theology, despite a lifetime of “scholarship”, can assure the readers of a “learned” book that “Canaanite and Phoenician paganism” contrasted with “the faith and practice of Israel”. The only contrast here is in the author’s tendentious choice of words to describe the religion he favours and the one he does not.

Albright and all the many other biblical bigots can only see the source of their own religion as dynamic and true while the religions of the Canaanite neighbours of the Israelites were static and false. Because these religions are dead, they were seen as already dead even when they were alive, while the religion of a small minority of the people of Canaan, the Israelites, was alive, and so it has remained. God’s religion was an active historical stage for Him to unfold his plan, though quite why God had to unfold his plan in this restricted and obscure way, rather than unfolding it for everyone He had created in the world, is never answered. No one knows because the whole thing is a fantasy of clerics intent on controlling simple people to their own financial advantage.

Albright saw the Israelites as non-Canaanites who had entered the land from outside whether by conquest as the bible says or by infiltration, as the theologians accepted as a fall back position. There was not the least bit of evidence on or under the ground for any such invasion, and Albright was an archaeologist! The received view

today is that, if there is no hint of a change of culture in some respect, then there was no change. There is no hint, so there was no change. What changed was the climate.

Dessication of the land in the Bronze Age led to some Canaanites having to take to a more marginal method of living, pastoralism probably supplemented by the proceeds of banditry. These hill dwelling pastoral Canaanites and part time bandits were called the Apiru or Hebrews. At a later date, just as the Iron Age was beginning, the climate became less arid and conditions changed back to those suitable for sedentary life. The Hebrew bandits started to go straight, settling down first in the hills, then they were gradually admitted back into civilized society. They had not entered or re-entered Canaan, they were ethnically Canaanites, a mixed group anyway, and they had Canaanite culture throughout.

### **What happened to Moses?**

Israelite religion must therefore have been a variant of the religions practised by Canaanites in general. The main difference which arose between this religion and other neighboring ones was that the Persians selected Jerusalem as the centre of a pseudo-Zoroastrian cult based on the local god Yehouah. There was no particular slow variation from other Canaanite religions, but there was a sudden imposition of a foreign cult on to the local religion of Jerusalem. The imposition was resisted by locals for many decades but ultimately it triumphed, albeit in a highly fragmentated state.

This imposition is the reason why Yehouah became monotheistic and is probably why the religion also rejected images. As Herodotus noted, the religion of the Persians was relatively free of images. Christianity was far from shy of sacred imagery despite its Judaic roots and monotheism is seen by many progressive people today as symbolic of religious intolerance rather than fidelity. In particular, the submergence of the Goddess is seen by many religious people as a huge disservice to both men and women through neglect of feminine attributes that today are seen as desirable in both sexes, but which have been unnaturally suppressed in favour of an exaggerated masculinity.

Clearly, this history precludes the whole of the myth of Moses and the Exodus and, indeed, all of the bible until the Israelites were settled in Canaan. The Pentateuch or the five books of Moses, called by the Jews the Torah, are no longer thought by any scholars as early works as they once were. They were originally thought to have been written by Moses himself, a man who is supposed to have died about 1300 BC. Now they are thought to have been written no earlier than the "restoration".

Of course, it is possible that the books were written late but used much earlier sources. That seems quite likely but some will not even go that far. And even if true, no one can be sure which parts of it are genuinely old and which parts are not simply a much later romance. People about the time of Christ, or just before, were just as able as more recent authors like Sir Walter Scott or William Shakespeare at writing historical fiction, but no bible basher will consider the possibility.

The truth is that both books of the Christian bible are sugar baskets of popular fiction holding nuggets of historical truth. Dissolve away the fiction and the history remains, but no one has a suitable solvent, and so no one knows what is true and what is not. What we can say is that there is not the least evidence for large chunks of the Old Testament as it is presented to us and therefore it is likely to be mainly fictional.

Norman Gottwald tries to retrieve something by saying that, although the people and specific places might be false, the cultural and social situation might be accurately represented. It is another way of admitting that the people who wrote these historical dramas were not fools. They had read poems, sagas, myths and books written in earlier times and just as any competent author can today, they were able to reconstruct a fair representation of a historical period. Into it they placed their fictional characters just as Scott or Shakespeare would.

Gottwald tries to give this contrivance a scientific air by calling people and places H1 and period detail as H2. So, all right, the period detail might be correct but we can only be sure by using independent sources, and even then, so what? The period detail is not the point of the stories in the Jewish scriptures. If Joshua or Deborah did not exist, what do their stories tell us? The answer is that the Persianized or Hellenized Jews had a talented Catherine Cookson, quite able to write good stories.

Apparently, the books of Samuel use the word “Hebrews” in a pejorative way that fits well with independent evidence that it meant bandits at that time. In other words, it is rather like the word “Viking” and who is to know that the word did not retain that connotation and that the Hebrews were not rather proud of it? It would fit in excellently with the self image of the Maccabees who probably sponsored the “Hebrew” scriptures and had stood as outlaws against the Greeks to win the independence of Palestine. The word Hebrew was never used as the name of a language until Jesus ben Sirach used it in the preface of *Ecclesiasticus*. To the Maccabees it was a complement.

This brings up the level of psychological truth that might be in the scriptures. They tell more about the writers than about the subject. Honest scholars will have a great deal more to discover about this aspect of the bible than they have hitherto. The themes throughout the scriptures are those of the people being liberated and returning to a promised land, of people who were lost and subject to the temptations of foreign gods, of people wandering and finding a home, of people crossing into a kingdom, all the time harassed by alien peoples. This is how the Maccabees saw themselves and the Jews, and it was their battles against the alien Greeks that the bible is a set of allegories about.

## **A Proper Historical Approach**

There is not the least bit of evidence ever found that the Israelites were ever in captivity in Egypt and escaped to discover a Promised Land. It was the Maccabees who led the Jews to a promised land of their own, not Moses. What had happened in history and was known by Jewish writers at the time of the “restoration”, was that Palestine had been a colony of Egypt for long periods of history. The decline of Egypt and the rise of Assyria, culminating in the annexation of Egypt by Assyria under Esarhaddon in the seventh century, allowed the Palestinian mini-states to throw off the yoke of Egypt. The metaphor of the Exodus served as an allegory of the freeing of Palestine from the Egyptians, as an expression of the Egyptians as traditional enemies of the Jews and as a vehicle for the adoption of the laws brought by the Persians.

What the faithful do not like is that Palestine has a genuine history separate from the scriptural romances and the purpose of scholars should be to try to find out what it is. Once the bible is put on one side as untrustworthy, the way forward that suggests itself is to study all of the Palestinian mini-states together in a comprehensive study of the whole region between Egypt and the Euphrates. The religions in particular of the region should be

studied independently of the major religions that later emerged because it has been the constant distortion of forcing everything through this unnatural sieve that has produced such a lot of incomprehensible intellectual spaghetti.

Already archaeology has shown that Israel and Judaea were not religiously or ethnically distinct from other small states in the region like Moab, Edom, Ammon and the rest of Canaan. Even if these states existed before the eighth century BC they would not have prevented the other people of the region from travelling. If they existed, they existed for trade because the economies of the hill countries were based on a narrow range of produce, olives, vine and sheep, necessitating trade. The region's population must have had a certain mobility and must have continued to mix. Monotheism was not the norm until after the exile. It was the influence of Persia that created a distinctive Judaism stripped of earlier features such as a popular goddess, fertility rites, astrology and divination.

The Christian and Jewish "scholars" to whom this is anathema object that their critics are anti-religious, as if any criticism of these artificial and backward religions implies criticism of *all* religion. In fact, some of the critics are perfectly conscientious Christians and Jews but ones who put integrity ahead of paperhanging. That, though, is something that too many sanctimonious wafer-nibblers cannot understand. They cannot see Israel and Judah as anything other than the singular nations their bibles say they were, and are quite unable to draw the conclusions that the evidence insists upon.

A proper historical approach to this geographical area will show the growth of the mini-states and their religions in context and most importantly will allow us to see precisely how Judaism really began with the edict of Cyrus. If the Christian God really has a plan, it is time we all found out how it really developed. What is so disastrous if Zoroaster was God's first prophet, not Moses?



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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 1. The Crisis of Sacred History**  
**Biblical Language: Hebrew & Aramaic**

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## **The Hebrew Language**

The language spoken by the Israelites was not called Hebrew in any known texts until the prologue to *Ecclesiasticus* (Ben Sirach, 130 BC). In *Isaiah* 36:11,13, “Judean” was the language of Judah while, in *Isaiah* 19:18, it is the “language of Canaan”). Hebrew is therefore Canaanite (Phœnician) even according to the most respected prophet of Israel. Proof is that it is closely similar to the language spoken at an earlier time in the Phœnician town of Ugarit. This seems conclusive evidence that the Israelites were the same stock as the Phœnicians, and so cannot have been invaders from Egypt.

Moreover, the variety of Phœnician later called Hebrew has never been found in any texts from the second millennium BC. It is not simply that nothing has been found in the Hebrew language and script, but that nothing has been found that could be considered as Hebrew written in any other script. Thus, none of the Amarna letters are written in Hebrew even though some of them seem to be from places in the southern Levant. This is another serious obstacle to the idea that Moses led the Israelites into Canaan at the time of the Hyksos expulsion from Egypt. But even a later exodus led by the prophet around 1200 does not identify itself through Hebrew texts or inscriptions. Words that also appear in Hebrew can be found, but they simply indicate that Hebrew is a later dialect derived from Canaanite and has similar words to that and other Semitic languages.

The language spoken in the Palestinian hills could have sounded much different from that of Tyre and Sidon. Anyone familiar with the UK knows that even today the broad Glasgow accent is incomprehensible to anyone outside of Glasgow. Others, like Geordie, used to be the same, not many years back. Thus the rural dialect of Canaanite could have sounded quite different from the urban dialects. The shibboleth story (*Jg* 12:16) admits to regional varieties of speech.

There appears to have been different styles of language even within Jerusalem.

B S J Isserlin, *The Israelites*

Even so, “there is as yet no epigraphic evidence for such wider assumptions” as that northern Israelite speech was peculiar. The bible says that Amos the shepherd from the southern kingdom preached in the northern one implying that they were sufficiently close dialects to be mutually understood. Despite this, scholars can identify distinct features that are northern ones. This scholarship is based on a minimum of hard evidence and a maximum of pious fancy posing as scientific analysis.

Much of dialectal speech is in the variant pronunciation of vowels, and this might have been a practical reason why vowels were not used in written Canaanite. Even so, in transcribing strange accents, though, much depended on the ear of the scribe, and so transliteration cannot have been regular.

Biblical Hebrew is a curiously stunted language with only about 8000 known words in its vocabulary compared

with a practical minimum of about 20,000. The reason is, of course, that biblical Hebrew is not a real language at all, but was devised for devotional reasons, and mainly restricts itself to devotional subjects. It is a particular subset of Canaanite, deliberately resurrected by the third century priests who were writing and compiling the bible.

Biblical Hebrew is relatively free of foreign words, fatuously called “loan” words as if they were borrowed for a while then returned. In an analogous fashion, fundamentalist Christians claim Christianity has not “borrowed” from other religions. No, it has stolen from them! Hebrew does not even have many Egyptian words, a surprising fact for a nation that even the myth claims spent several hundred years as slaves for the pharaohs, and known history tells us was an Egyptian colony for centuries until about 900 BC. There are more foreign words in Hebrew from Babylon, a place where only some of the Jews lived for only about half a century. More important, B S J Isserlin says (*The Israelites*) is that “Phœnician style and diction influenced Hebrew writers”. More astonishing scholarship, considering the languages were the same. It is said merely to maintain the pretence that Hebrew was somehow—presumably because God ordained it—different from Canaanite. Here the meaning is that biblical phrases have been found in Ugaritic Canaanite.

In spite of the great distance in space and time, Ugaritic literature is astonishingly close to that of ancient Israel.

B S J Isserlin, *The Israelites*

The parallelism that denotes Hebrew, Ugaritic and Akkadian poetry is so close in the Ugaritic to the Hebrew that the same word pairs are common, and even whole phrases appear in both.

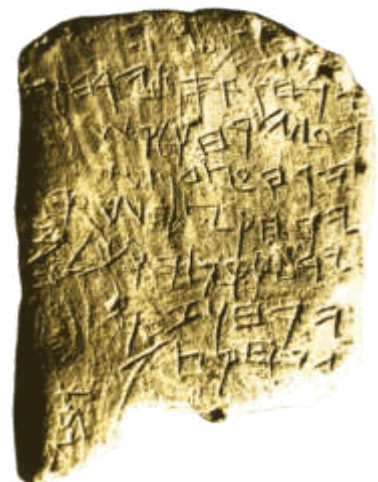
Hebrew poetry is part of a continuum covering the late Bronze age and Iron Age Levant.

B S J Isserlin, *The Israelites*

Aramaic influence is also evident, but since it became the official language of trade and diplomacy from the Persian period, that is hardly surprising, except that it tends to suggest a date after the Persian conquest. If the incidence of Aramaic words is taken as a sign of lateness, then *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* are fingered as late.

The supposedly objective criterion for the dating of texts is language and this is universally taken by biblicists as showing that the *Torah* is written in “standard Biblical Hebrew,” which is assumed to have been the language of the monarchy. The Phœnician 22 letter alphabet was current in the Levant by 1000 BC. The biblical scholars have no hesitation, though, in calling an ostrakon found at Izbet Sartah near Tel Aviv and dated in the eleventh century Israelite. The same is true of the tenth century Gezer calendar, even though the scholars cannot deny that it is written in “non-standard” Hebrew. More honest scholars demur.

Scholars who wish to date the *Torah*, to the “exilic” or post-“exilic” period, typically ignore the linguistic evidence, the biblicist “scholars” tell them. The trouble with the linguistic evidence presented by biblicists is that it is circular, if not utterly tortuous. The biblical internal chronology dates the grammar



Gezer Calendar

and syntax of the books and that dates the text, but the revisionist proposal is that the text is wrongly dated in the first place! Essentially, all of it is post-Persian, and the supposed earlier works might have been written or at least comprehensively edited among the last, in fact. The whole system could be almost on its head. Dating text has to be done using external sources, not in the biblicist circular fashion.

D N Freedman, a well-known Christian scholar of the W F Albright school of deception complains about the doctoral thesis of some student called D W Goodwin. This young man had the temerity to suggest that Freedman and Frank Moore Cross had a “common desire, even passion”, for dating certain biblical poems “early in Israel’s history”, meaning in the second millennium. Freedman and Cross being notables found themselves with considerable space in a learned journal called *Biblica* to refute this upstart. They describe the charge as a “hidden theological or historical motivation” yet accept that “there might be an element of truth” in it “to the extent that they shared W F Albright’s scholarly views.” These were, among others, that “archaeology provided a solid base and viable framework on which biblical history could be recovered and reconstituted”. Nevertheless, they denied the charge, and called Dr Goodwin sloppy.

Of course, “biblical” history does not need to be recovered and reconstituted. What they mean is that they want to prove the scriptures are true, and because they are committed to the idea that they are God’s words, there is only one outcome. Freedman can get a collection of books that he knows has been multiply edited up to at least 200 BC, and find in it poems that he can date without a blush in the thirteenth century BC. Israelite slaves in Egypt were writing poetry between making bricks for Rameses’ palaces. Or they were writing poems while they were following a sentient column of smoke through the Sinai desert.

The poems he considered are biblical, so he is telling us that these poems, or some of them, were written before 1200 BC! The *Song of Deborah* is eleventh century, however, and is “one of the oldest surviving examples of Israelite poetry”. He dates it to this time because she was a supposedly a judge, and so it was in the time of the Judges, assumed to be in the gap in history between Joshua and David. The “giant among twentieth century biblical scholars” can deduce these wonders despite the fact that he confesses to us that few of the original archaic forms have remained in the Masoretic text.

Freedman is a specialist in Hebrew and its dialects. He can distinguish between the Hebrew dialects of Israel and Judah. He seems not to tell us what dialect the original Israelites spoke but it is surprising that he has not. He tells us that Phœnicians did not indicate final vowels in their script but Hebrews did. A lot of questions present themselves here. Were Phœnician and Hebrew fixed and unchanging? The answer is obviously not, and Freedman himself plots changes in both languages to earn his living. Did every Phœnician city follow the same writing practices? Plainly they did not and doubtless other cities did not either. Cities in the north were multicultural and the cultures must have reflected in the orthography.

### **Phœnician and Hebrew Varieties**

Freedman is the expert but seems to find Phœnician remarkably uniform compared with Hebrew. Since Hebrew is essentially a dialect of Phœnician, one wonders to what extent, even great men like Freedman can be so comfortable with their assignments. It must be God’s guiding spirit. Freedman knows his Phœnician and can distinguish it throughout time and space from the Hebrew that he also knows.

Indeed he knows two Hebrew varieties. The Israelite dialect of Hebrew followed the Ugaritic and the Phœnician while the Judahite dialect followed the Aramaic and the Arabic. Essentially, he finds some variation in such as endings and the use of certain consonants as vowels and decides that some are northern and others are southern. The northern means Israel and the southern means Judah. *2 Samuel* 22 is northern, while *Psalms* 18, the same poem, is southern. The error is the usual biblicist error of assigning discoveries on the basis of the bible and nothing else. If the bible was written as a book for the whole of Abarnahara, then it would be hardly surprising if it did not contain dialects and regional variations in the official language that was chosen for it. That two can be picked out relatively easily does not verify that there were countries called Israel and Judah, and should not be assigned to them without external verification. That gets difficult indeed to do because the biblicists insist on having dates that are stretched out to suit their biblical history.

From an examination of the Masoretic text, Freedman concludes that the scriptures we have date from the century after the “exile”, the fifth century. His practical limits are 400 to 100 BC but he can hardly bear the late start, so adds that it “could be” earlier. He notes that some of the Yahud seals that are found in good quantities have a “waw” for the “u” while others do not. This mixture he calls a transitional practice and uses it to date the stamps around the return from “exile”, the absence of the “waw” being the pre-“exilic” practice. Again from the bible, he sees the natural transition as the “exile”, and therefore assigns his transitional forms to it. All we know is that purely consonantal writing was earlier and the introduction of the intermediate vowel-consonants came later. Freedman admits that the present Masoretic text of the bible cannot be earlier than about 400, well after the “exile” when any transitional forms should have been edited out.

Freedman’s co-worker, Frank M Cross, has studied palaeography to date some 4Q scroll fragments of *Exodus*, *2 Samuel* and *Jeremiah*. They are 225 BC  $\pm$  50 years. If the principles of recording these manuscripts are those of the Masoretes, and they show no transitional traits, the Masoretic graphological discipline must have started much earlier, he says. In fact, 4QSam<sup>(b)</sup> does retain older forms including the spelling of David as “dwd”, not “dwyd”, the normal Essenic practice. From this, Freedman deduces that 4QSam<sup>(b)</sup> is fourth century despite the palaeography! So, the Masoretic method was inaugurated in about the fourth century and was established as the standard by about 200 BC. It suggests that Masoretic graphological practices began when the Persians began to establish Judaism from the end of the fifth century BC. Since this was also about the time that Aramaic was introduced as the official script of the Persian empire, the connexion of them all seems sensible enough.

A result of the Persian occupation and the changes they introduced was the indication of vowels. The fact that dialect changes had already led to the disappearance of diphthongs in one case—the Phœnician—meant that the vowel-consonants like “yodh” and “waw” had already disappeared and the pure vowels that remained were not shown. In the other dialect, taken to be the Aramaean, the diphthongs remained and so the vowels had a “waw”, a “he” or a “yodh” to indicate them. Originally, Hebrew and Phœnician both omitted final vowel letters, but Hebrew changed around the tenth century—or was it the fifth?

*Job* is an extremely strange biblical book. W F Albright dated it to no later than about 500 BC. That would make it conventionally one of the last biblical books, but still dated to the beginning of the second temple period when even biblicists will accept that modern Judaism began. It therefore had a minimum of half a millenium to make its mark on the rest of the scriptures. It made none. It neither mentions them nor is mentioned by them. Furthermore, even Albright was happy to accept that in style and literary affinities—vocabulary, syntax, poetic

and mythological allusions—the book was Phœnician. Its cosmology and cosmogony are Phœnician. Place names are Phœnician, and lastly the skepticism of the book suggests a worldly influence typical of Greeks and Phœnicians.

*Psalms* 29 is also Canaanite. The references and places in it are all in the north of the Levant—the north of Abarnahara. The sons of El have to praise Yehouah. Sons of El could mean the worshippers of El, so here could be a psalm from the period of transition from El worship to Yehouah worship. The name Yehouah occurs no less than 18 times in an eleven verse poem. He is also given various other attributes, qualities and names.

## Dwd or Dwyd?

Freedman examines the books of the bible in respect of the spelling of David, and finds astonishing consistency. In 1073 instances of the name, 788 are spelt “dwd” and 285 are spelt “dwyd”, but there are only five cases in three books when “dwyd” is used when “dwd” is dominant (183 times), and there is only one case when “dwd” is used when “dwyd” is dominant (8 times) and even this arises by taking all the minor prophets together. 271 cases of “dwyd” occur in the books of the Chronicler with no cases of “dwd”, and 575 cases of “dwd” occur in *Samuel* with no cases of “dwyd”. In just three books there is one or the other.

Freedman says not much can be deduced from the odd instances but he finds enough to talk about from them to fill a few pages. His conclusions are predicated, as ever, on the “exile”. “Dwd” is pre-“exilic” and proves the books containing it are pre-“exilic” while “dwyd” is post-“exilic”, explaining its use by the Chronicler. The four mixed cases are transitional. *Ecclesiastes* is accepted as post-“exilic” but has a single case of “dwd”. Freedman says it is a deliberate archaism. *Song of Songs* has a single case of “dwyd” but is supposed to be Solomonic. That is because this edition is post-“exilic” but the original was not. *Proverbs* is considered post-“exilic” but has a single case of “dwd”. That is because it reflects a tradition rooted in the Davidic court so tradition has preserved the “dwd”. *Ruth*, thought to be a late romance, has two cases of “dwd”. The use of “dwd” here proves the book to be pre-“exilic”. *Kings* has 93 cases of “dwd” to 3 of “dwyd”, and *Ezekiel* has 4 cases of “dwd” to one of “dwyd”. These show that these cases are transitional. There is no reason to be humble before the great man here. This is all utter bollocks! Freedman is like his God. He makes rules then immediately feels free to break them.

Take a look at the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. The practice of the Essene copyists was to use “dwyd”, and “dwyd” is found in books that have only “dwd” in the MT. *4QSam*<sup>(a)</sup> dated to about 100 BC has “dwyd” as has other fragments of *Samuel*, but an earlier version *4QSam*<sup>(b)</sup> has “dwd”. It seems the Essenes had no compunction about using “dwyd” when “dwd” in the bible is the norm, yet if “dwyd” is the later form why were all biblical instances not changed to “dwyd?” Freedman wants it to be respect for the original text when the book was published. Thus early books retained “dwd” even when copied in the late period. This even though Freedman claims that some texts are transitional. Why did the transition not continue, then? Evidently it did at Qumran, but nowhere else.

The plain answer to this puzzle is not a question of the “exile” and peculiar respect for an ancient name in some instances, but not others. There were two schools of scribes, one of whom stuck to the ancient “dwd” and the other used “dwyd”. To judge from what Freedman tells us, one school used the Masoretic discipline while the other school was the Essenes. The Masoretic discipline with its “dwd” orthography lasted while the Essenes disappeared. It seems the writers of the *New Testament* transliterated the word David into the Greek using

“dwyd”, and that is how we spell it still.

Why then is there any cases of “dwyd” remaining in the bible, when it seems the successful school of scribes preferred “dwd?” The answer must be that *Chronicles* was accepted into the canon after the Jewish war. At that point, the rabbis who took control of copying treated the scripts they had as sacred and so did not harmonize the spelling. The Chronicler was therefore copied by Essenes, if not written by them.

## A Chomskyan Approach

Younger analysts are trying to be more objective. Vincent de Caën, of the University of Toronto, says Hebrew grammar has been taken to be a constant, and that must be false, because any natural language must change.

Because Hebrew was God's language and God never changes, it was easy and perhaps logical to assume that Hebrew had a uniform character and personality and was not subject to either internal or historical development and change.

Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*.

De Caën says it is shocking that, after two centuries of intense study of Hebrew, no better distinction has been found in it other than a vague classification into early and late biblical Hebrew. Biblical Hebrew is several dialects in the bible, but the number of them is in single figures. Linguistic variation in Hebrew must be taken seriously. The variation that is noticed is considered intractable and random. For biblicists, the absolute dating of texts and sources is chiselled on stone tablets, and these are used to date the variations that are bothered about. But if these texts have been misdated and their dates are really jumbled up, the natural changes will appear random or intractable. Some books such as *Ecclesiastes* and the Hebrew of Qumran, as well as the Hebrew of the sages and rabbis, can be dated accurately and this is the key that unlocks a rigorous dialectology of biblical Hebrew.

Typically, when *questions are sharply formulated*, it is learned that even elementary phenomena had escaped notice, and that intuitive accounts that seemed simple and persuasive are entirely inadequate.

N Chomsky, *The Minimalist Program*

Minimalism is Noam Chomsky's programme in linguistics based on the theory of generative grammar.

Anyone familiar with the range of current scholarship will know that the gap between the biblical Israel and the history of Palestine is widening, and that “new scholarly constructs are in the process of emerging”.

P Davies

## Biblical Minimalism

Minimalism is the quest for theoretical economy in biblical history. Biblicists use “Minimalism” as a term of abuse for the Enlightenment horrors of criticism, skepticism and disbelief fought by the church for centuries, and still! Biblical minimalism is the right and duty to be methodologically sound and non-theological in investigating late Iron Age Palestine and the Persian province of Yehud, by whatever method, independent of the biblical image



of “ancient Israel”.

If the scientific approach is minimalism then the biblicist one is “Maximalism”. Maximalists think a literary devotional work, the bible, is historically true. Plainly, they do not believe in God, since, if they did, they would not want to hide the truth as it emerges. But they always have and now cannot be honest. They have no choice, to preserve their bacon, but to continue to lie harder than before.

Vincent de Caën follows Chomsky and Davies in that the future of historical studies of Canaan is a “Minimalist Programme”. As a student of Hebrew, De Caën wants linguists and literary critics to join with the growing number of archaeologists and historians who approach the study of the history of the Levant with a scientific rigour undistorted by the burden of faith, or the worry of where it might lead. He wants, for the first time, to let the Hebrew language “speak for itself, for it has a great deal to say”.

Hebrew, being a natural language, can be studied in terms of universal grammar. Chomskyan generative grammar is a mathematical model of language, but one which models psychological reality. A universal grammar is a general model that accounts for typological variation in natural languages. It can show how language acquisition works, how a speaker moves from an infantile state to a full-blown adult competence in a given language.

## The Natural Evolution of Hebrew

De Caën presumes that Hebrew developed continuously from the late Iron Age to the destruction of the Second Temple. This is a natural even if not a justified assumption, and if anyone contradicts it, they must show some acceptable reason why not. De Caën also takes the Hebrew of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* described by Elisha Qimron in 1986 as the end of development of the biblical strand of Hebrew. So, De Caën examines sequential forms of Hebrew verbs starting from the Hebrew of Qumran, and noting two processes at work, loss of stem-final vowel and suffixation.

1. Apocoptation or loss of stem-final vowel		
heh [e]#	changes to >	nothing
hkbyw [wayyivke]	changes to >	kbyw [wayyevk]
2. Suffixation		
nothing	changes to >	heh [a]#
btk)w [wa'extov]	changes to >	hbt) w [wa'extóva] / [wa'extvá]

The actual form consistently found in QH is 3. hkb)w [wa'evke] where neither apocoptation nor suffixation seem to have applied.

In the standard references, this is a nuisance to be ignored, or is explained away as an intrusion from the later, degenerate idiom and not worth further investigation. In fact it offers the chance to begin a site survey of an “archaeology” of Hebrew grammar, De Caën says. The solution involves setting aside the canonical, medieval reading of Hebrew. Then, reading the consonantal text alone, the *h* found in both rules is *ambiguous*, being

either [e] or [a]. Finally, from generative grammar, rule ordering, gives the sequence:

	a.	b.
	Regular Root	Glide-Final Root
Input	btk)w	hkb)w
Apocopation	—	kb)w
Suffixation	hbtk)w	hkb)w
QH Output	hbtk)w	hkb)w

At first, the first-person sequentials show no inflectional endings. The final “h” of the glide-final form (b) is a vowel letter indicating the stem-final [e]. The first rule to apply is apocopation, the cutting away of the final vowels. This rule applies across the board to all such forms, but crucially catching the first-person sequential of glide-final roots (b). The second rule of suffixation applies to *all* first-person forms, indicated by the orthographic “h” (both a and b), but this “h” now represents a final [a], not [e]. The elegance and simplicity of this account is that both rules apply *without exceptions*. They apply serially. Linguistic logic dictates a *prima facie* bizarre prediction: the final “h” must disappear but then return!

De Caën tests his idea using “uncontroversially” dated books.

Iron IIC	Assyrian	c 700		amos, isa
	Babylonian	c 600	dt*	ezek, jer
Persian	Persian I	c 500	gen*, exod*	zech
	Persian II	c 400	num*, gen 12-18	job
Gr-Roman	Hellenistic	c 300	dt 5, 31-32, exod 8-9	ezra-neh*, ecc
	Hasmonean	c 150		qumran
The symbol * indicates the bulk of the book in question.				
Tentative Six fold Stratification of Ancient Hebrew				

De Caën gives cross tabulations of the phenomenon from the books of the bible. Using whole books is admittedly a rough measure but serves as an initial approximation. The books used are prophetic in the first instance (*Amos* and *First Isaiah*, *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*), supplemented by Persian *Zechariah* and *Job* and Hellenistic *Ecclesiastes*. This crude distribution gives promising enough results to encourage a closer investigation of books by pericopes.

Already it confirms a Wellhausian-type of documentary hypothesis, but with the order D, JE, P—*Deuteronomy* is the first! Accepting the initial dating of the reference books, *Torah* books, the psalms, and the historical books can be tentatively dated.

Another interesting case is the alternation between [-athu] and [-attu] when the 3ms object /hu/ is suffixed to the 3fs past tense ending in inflectional /at/. We would correctly predict the movement [athu] > [attu]. The distribution of such forms is:

[-athu]	[-attu]
Genesis (2x, chap. 37)	Job (5x)
Judges (3x)	Zechariah (5:4)
Isaiah (59:16)	Ruth (4:15)
Ezekiel (6x)	
2 Chronicles (22:11)	
Psalms 105:19	
Proverbs 31:12	Proverbs 7:21 and 31:1
1 Samuel 18:28	1 Samuel 1:24 and 16:14
Distribution of [athu] vs [attu]	

Books (*Proverbs*, *Samuel*), known to be composite, will straddle the dividing line. [-attu] should be found in the late *Proverbs*. Yet, the putatively early [-athu] appears in *Proverbs* 31:12 within a few verses of the expected form [-attu] in *Proverbs* 31:1. Inspection shows a block of material ascribed to king Lemuel, *prima facie* from an earlier anthology. This is where the *ex hypothesi* earlier [-athu] appears. [-attu] is in the editorial superscription, from the latest stratum of the book. This is what was expected and shows the usefulness of the method for source criticism.

*Zechariah* tentatively, based on one distinction, seems a transition from Persian I to Persian II. Further study should bear out the transitional nature of *Zechariah*.

The forms in [ihu] cluster in the latest stratum and are expected at Qumran. Since they would have been expected as early constructs, Schniedewind (1999) thought they were an attempt to reconstruct “preclassical” forms, for ideological reasons, because it looked like a deliberate archaism:

It remains difficult to explain the reappearance [of the *he*] in Qumran Hebrew.

In fact, the apparent regression can be explained, by rule ordering. In the latest period, the systematically anomalous forms in [iw], the result of an earlier (preclassical) process, viz the elision or syncopation of /h/, were regularized by analogy with such forms as [uhu], [ohu], [iha]. The invention of an “antilanguage” is to save God’s theoreticians who, to keep their predetermined literary and linguistic history, have to find the data otherwise inexplicable.

Vincent de Caën concludes that the convergence of critical history, anthropology and archaeology together with

historical linguistics is striking, even at this early stage. The method is novel and might be promising, but seems too circular as long as it confines itself to biblical books. De Caën says he has much more to say, and it will be interesting to see it.

## Biblical Aramaic

The Aramaic passages that appear in *Ezra* and *Daniel* turn out to be strong evidence that these books, if no others, were written in the Hellenistic Age. They were, of course, originally thought by Christian and Jewish scholars to have been written in an ancient form of Aramaic in use in Babylon and Persia in the time of the “Jewish Exile” and “Return”.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, Aramaic epigraphic texts and papyri have been found, notably those of Elephantine, in upper Egypt, dated to the fifth century BC, which obviously are earlier than the Aramaic of *Ezra*, though *Ezra* was supposedly written at the beginning of that century. Many Christian and Jewish believers have villified this revealing discovery. Despite their so-called scholarship, they will never allow it to speak counter to their beliefs, and all too many will use anything, however unscholarly and unscrupulous, to uphold their mythical beliefs in the face of scientific truth.

Honest scholars question the authenticity of *Ezra*. *Daniel* is considered the work of an author not well versed in the Aramaic language. So, the Aramaic of the *Old Testament* is not historically credible.

The Aramaic of *Ezra* should be that of the Achaemenids, the Persian kings, while *Daniel*, written in the time of Antiochus IV shortly before the middle of the second century BC, should be in Palestinian Judaic Aramaic. Proper scholarly inspection shows *Ezra* to have elements later than the Persian Period and *Daniel* to have elements from before the second century BC. Something is odd about the supposedly ancient biblical Aramaic. Giovanni Garbini, in a paper on the [website of Ian Hutchesson](#), cites the example of *kl-qbl*, meaning “since,” an expression in common use from the second century BC in Judaic Aramaic, but absent from Persian Aramaic, which used simply *l-qbl* (accumulation of particles shows lateness). On this basis alone, biblical Aramaic is a late creation of those who spoke Judaic Palestinian Aramaic.

The expression “a decree went forth,” (Dan 2:13) implying from the mouth of the king, is an erosion inconceivable in the Persian period and confirms *Daniel* as a much later writing than it pretends to be.

Phrases in *Daniel* prove that the author was not familiar with the correct Aramaic of the Persian period that he was trying to imitate. The impression received from reading the “decree of Darius” (Dan. 6:8-14) is that the author had only a vague and confused idea of Achaemenid administrative prose. He has put together archaic words and phrases for the sake of readers unfamiliar with Persian Chancellery Aramaic but contented with a veneer of antiquity.

A Hebrew play on words detected as underlying an inexplicable part of the Aramaic *Daniel* implies it was composed in Hebrew. Thus the Aramaic parts of the book are after the middle of the second century BC and have their origin in a re-edition of an original Hebrew text, in which the Aramaic version of the text was aimed at giving the antique atmosphere of the Persian period, exactly as the author of *Ezra* had done with his Persian Chancellery Aramaic.

Among the difficulties of *Ezra* 4:7-11 is that of the names mentioned in verse 7 as authors of a letter to Artaxerxes. They are, in verse 7, Bishlam, Mithridates and Tabael (following the Masoretic). But instead Rehum and Shimshai (*Ezra* 4:8-9) write the letter to Artaxerxes and receive his reply (*Ezra* 4:17). Who then are Bishlam, Mithridates and Tabael?

Biblical commentators tell us that these three are the authors of a lost letter. Yet ancient versions like the *Septuagint* do not agree with the Masoretic on the number of the supposed authors of the letter. The *Septuagint* has only one author, Tabael, who wrote “alone to Mithridates.” The Vulgate has two authors, with three names, Beselam-Mithridates and Tabael. The Syriac has two authors, Mithridates and Tabael, who write “alone.” *1 Esdras* has six authors, the original three with Rehum, Shimshai and Beltethmus. Flavius Josephus in book 11 of *Antiquities of the Jews* omits the names. So much for the infallibility of the bible stories. Garbini’s linguistic analysis proves that Tabael alone wrote—“on the outside” (the real meaning of the apparent other names, Aramaic words not understood by the author) of the folded and sealed papyrus of the diplomatic letter sent to the king—an official abstract of the contents.

The words *bshlm mtrdt* (“on the folded wrapping”), despite their irrelevance, and misread as proper names, show ignorance of their proper meaning. Nevertheless, such details, though misunderstood by the author of *Ezra*, imply he had access to original documents. The next verse says what he wrote: “Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe have written this letter against Jerusalem to king Artaxerxes.” Such short declarations are found on the outside of various letters of Arsames, Satrap of Egypt.

So, Tabael was the Persian official who approved the correspondence sent to the sovereign, after having determined that it met the official protocols. The word used of the official approval is “nishtawan”, a Persian bureaucratic term. Including the “nishtawan” (*Ezra* 4:8) as if it were a part of letter proper (*Ezra* 4:9), shows that the author did not understand its purpose. None of those who transmitted the biblical text understood it because the bureaucracy of the Persian chancellery had been forgotten when the book was written or re-written—if it was re-written after the destruction of Nehemiah’s library in the Maccabean war. If Persian officialese had been forgotten, the book could not have been written in any period other than the Hellenistic period.

The word *gmr*, used only once in biblical Aramaic (*Ezra* 7:12), is found at the end of the first sentence of the letter to Ezra from king Artaxerxes.

Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, scribe of the law of the God of heaven *gmr*.

The root *gmr* in the Aramaic of the first millennium BC means “to complete” or “perfect”. Suffice it to say that conventional explanations, such as that it stands for “perfect peace,” “peace” being a common salutation (*Ezra* 4:17), are refuted by Garbini who shows that it is a title or attribute of Ezra himself—“the Perfect”. Ezra is a “perfect scholar of the law of the God of heaven.” In Talmudic Aramaic the verb *gmr* acquired the meaning “to learn the traditional law by heart”.

The heading of the letter echoes the eulogising of Ezra in the preceding verses, implying that the letter is merely a literary composition and so of dubious historical value. The letter simply is not like the authentic letters of the Achaemenid Chancellery. That is not to say no such letter was sent, but that this is a literary attempt to

reconstruct it, not a transcription of the original.

The bilingualism in *Daniel* was meant to imitate *Ezra*, but while the author of *Ezra* had access to original documents that served as models for the authors, even if they did not understand them, *Daniel* seems to have been based principally on *Ezra*. The feeble Aramaic of the dream of the statue (Dan 2:37ff) shows the Aramaic translator of *Daniel* trying to imitate old fashioned Persian Chancellery Aramaic, using *Ezra* as his model. The Aramaic of *Ezra* is an ignorant interpretation of poorly understood Achaemenid Chancellery Aramaic, but the Aramaic of *Daniel* merely copies *Ezra*.



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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 1. The Crisis of Sacred History**  
**The Evidence from Megiddo: David & Solomon**

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That the kingdom of David and Solomon was not as glorious or as extensive as the Bible indicates is certainly arguable and even probable.

**Hershel Shanks, Editor, *BAR***

### **The Bible Unearthed**

Israel Finkelstein, director of the Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University and co-director of the university's excavations at Megiddo, and Neil Asher Silberman, a professional journalist and director of historical interpretation for the Ename Center for Public Archaeology and Heritage Presentation in Belgium, have written an excellent book, *The Bible Unearthed*. In common with these pages, they set out to distinguish history and myth, and to inform ordinary people about the latest findings in Ancient Near Eastern and biblical scholarship. Finkelstein has carefully studied the archaeology of the emergence of Israelite society, and thereby lets us make better decisions about the feasibility of the united monarchy. In 1996, Finkelstein rejected his earlier traditional convictions and began to challenge the accepted chronology of Iron Age stratigraphy in the Levant, and proposed a sound chronology of Iron Age strata.

Is there, in tenth-century BC strata, anything to support the bible's authority that Jerusalem was the center of a powerful empire? Monumental structures, putatively Solomon's, had no sign of the legendary riches of that king in them. If these are not Solomon's in the tenth century, then whose buildings were they and from what century? The tenth century empire of David and Solomon did not exist because there was no Israel at all before the ninth century. Omri was the real founder of the state of Israel and the Omride dynasty (884-842 BC), as the Assyrian records and the Mesha stele say. This was Israel's first kingdom. Strata thought to have been tenth century at Megiddo and other places were really ninth century BC, and city walls, ashlar palaces, and six-chambered gates at sites such as Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer could not have been built by Solomonic as *1 Kings* 9:15 describes, but the earliest defences of the new Omride state of Samaria.

Finkelstein is the first well-known archaeologist to admit that the biblical united monarchy is an ideological myth conceivably as late as the Maccabees. Archaeologists depend on the biblical record of the tenth century BC in spite of the lack of direct evidence, and so Iron Age archaeology must be freed from the bible for objective progress to be made. He gives examples of archaeologists just accepting the bible as historical, such as Yadin's dating of Hazor Stratum X which Yadin saw as answering to *1 Kings* 9:15.

Finkelstein and Silberman say the Deuteronomistic historian wrote *Deuteronomy*, and *Joshua*, *Judges*, *1 and 2 Samuel*, and *1 and 2 Kings*, but they accept the bible's own deception that *Deuteronomy* was discovered in the reign of Josiah, the seventh century BC reforming king. Something must have stimulated this astonishing and self-deprecating explosion of creative activity in the time of Josiah, but nothing seems obviously significant enough to have done so. The activity and the apparent self-abuse of the Jews is better attributed to the Persians two centuries later.



*Mesha of Moab Stele*

The exodus and the conquest of Canaan never happened. Joshua's campaign of sudden conquest through Canaan, and the slow tribe by tribe settlement in *Judges* are *contradictory*. The authors of *The Bible Unearthed* find the territorial and ideological aspirations of the biblical account mirrored in the Deuteronomistic historian.

The bible's witness to the presence of kingdoms in and around tenth century Israel is not confirmed in imperial architecture. Monumental architecture at Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, and Beth Shan cannot unequivocally be considered alone as confirmation of an imperial state operating in tenth century Israel. Finkelstein argues that, in the ninth century BC, the northern kingdom of Israel "would emerge as the first real, full blown state in Iron Age Palestine."

### **Megiddo and the Palestinian Dark Age**

For 400 years, during which the two Israelite kingdoms of Israel and Judah were supposedly in their glory days, archaeologists in Palestine have no firm chronological markers. Palestinian archaeology is bracketed by the withdrawal of Twentieth Dynasty Egypt from Canaan in the late-twelfth century BC, well-attested in material remains and extra-biblical literary records, and the Assyrian campaigns of the late eighth century BC, when thick layers of destruction are assumed to be left by Assyrian forces.

For four centuries a Palestinian "Dark Age" extends during which nothing has ever been found that can be identified with any event of known date. The dark age is notionally marked at either end by clear events, a battle fought between the Egyptians and Mediterranean raiders called the Sea Peoples during the reign of Rameses III, recorded in Egyptian inscriptions, and detailed records left by the Assyrians—chronologically anchored to an eclipse in 763 BC—which recount campaigns against the Israelites and other inhabitants of Palestine in the late eighth century BC.

This black hole in time covers most of Iron Age I (the Joshua invasion of Canaan), the days of the United Monarchy and the entire history of the northern kingdom of Israel. In this 400 years, there is no other reliable anchor, although the conquest of c 925 BC by Shishak is taken by biblicists as the main biblical anchor in the Iron Age history of Israel.

Though some inscriptions have been discovered, such as the Mesha Stele from Dibon, the Shoshenq Stele from Megiddo, or the Aramaic inscription from Tel Dan, they were not found *in situ*, in clear stratigraphical contexts which would have dated them. These inscriptions were all found on the surface, or in a contaminated or later context and therefore do not have any value for dating.

Lacking dateable finds, archaeologists have dated the strata in this period by sentimental, theological and quasi-historical (biblical) considerations—in short, fancy!—and not on any reliable basis, because there was none. A proposed revision of the dating of remains in Israel challenges the historical reality of the biblical account of Israelite settlement, the major Israelite state in Palestine founded by King David and the immensely rich empire from Sinai to the Euphrates, as described in *1 Kings* 4:21, created by Solomon. The controversy has been declared central to religious faith.

For the public interested in biblical archaeology, it affects central matters of faith.

Archaeologist Steven Rosen of the Ben-Gurion University

Another archaeologist charged that downgrading David and Solomon was providing a “fig leaf to the anti-Semites.” The origins of this battle is a place famous for battles, an artificial hill (Tel) in the Jezreel valley and a prominent ancient site in northern Israel. It is Megiddo, from which is derived the word, Armageddon—in Hebrew, Har Megiddo, Hill of Megiddo. Findings at Megiddo have set off this battle among archaeologists and biblicists. It is a revealing story for the thesis of these pages and can be verified by logging into the [official Megiddo website](#), the source of much of this information, for those who incline not to believe what we say here.

## Archaeologists at Megiddo

Overlooking the highway from Egypt to Asia at the outlet of a pass through the Carmel Range, Megiddo has a 6,000-years history of continuous settlement, was occupied throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages, which in the Levant stretched roughly from 3300 BC to 600 BC, and is repeatedly named in the ancient archives of Egypt and Assyria. Megiddo was a city ruled successively by Egyptians, Canaanites, Israelites, Assyrians and Persians.

Megiddo's strategic location, abundant water supply, fertile agricultural hinterland, and close contact with neighboring peoples such as the Phoenicians and Egyptians, enabled it to become the seat of a local dynasty of Bronze Age city-state princes. Megiddo was surrounded by high, beaten-earth ramparts—a defensive feature that can still be discerned in the steep tel slopes. Its prosperity is evident in the furnishings of its main palace, a cosmopolitan mix of Egyptian, Aegean, and Canaanite styles.

In the fifteenth century BC, the wealthy and powerful princes of Megiddo joined a rebellion of Canaanite rulers against Egyptian demands for money and soldiers for their campaigns. Pharaoh Thutmose III (1479-1425 BC)

relates, on the walls of the great Temple of Karnak in Upper Egypt, the destruction of the alliance by Egyptian forces at Megiddo. Megiddo was not destroyed, or was quickly rebuilt if it was, because letters sent by Biridiya, the Canaanite prince of Megiddo, to the Pharaohs Amenhotep III (1391-1353 BC) and Amenhotep IV (1353-1335 BC) have been found among the El Amarna tablets.

*Joshua* 12:21 specifically mentions the defeat of the king of Megiddo and the allotment of his territory to the tribe of Manasseh. *Judges* 5:19 describes a triumph by a coalition of Israelite tribes against the Canaanite kings:

The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo.

The Israelites supposedly invading Canaan brought a violent end to the great northern city state. Destruction in the palace area, dated 1150 BC, is more likely to be a raid by Sea Peoples, but in either case the city was quickly restored, and artistic and architectural styles remained Canaanite, as they did even long after Israelites were supposed to have settled in the nearby hill country, suggesting cultural continuity.

In the Jewish scriptures, Megiddo was one of the northern strongholds of the Israelite king Solomon. Battles between great empires whose armies crossed the region were fought there. Biblical accounts of the ancient clashes at Megiddo may underlie its apocalyptic mystique, for, according to the the *Book of Revelation*, it will be the site of the battle between God and his enemies when time comes to an end, the final, apocalyptic battle between the cosmic forces of Good and Evil at the End of Days—a concept that evolved from Zoroastrianism because it implies the Zoroastrian duality of power between Good and Evil, and must be utterly pointless when a loving Almighty God, the creator of the cosmos itself, could prevent it with a word of His mouth.

Archaeologists have been drawn to Megiddo for more than a century by the thought of uncovering a royal city, mentioned eight times in the bible. They have uncovered one of the most important cities in the Ancient Near East.

The first expedition to Megiddo by the German Oriental Society sponsored by Kaiser Wilhelm II was between 1903 and 1905. Directed by Gottlieb Schumacher and deeply influenced by the methods of Heinrich Schliemann at Troy, the excavators drove an enormous trench through the middle of the tel and laid bare a complex of massive buildings. Small finds included a magnificent carved seal bearing the name Jeroboam—the first artifact recovered from an archaeological dig to be associated with an ancient Israelite king.

Between 1925 and 1939, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago undertook a more systematic examination, with substantial funds provided by John D Rockefeller, Jr. The tel was worked all the year round while the staff lived in some luxury at what is now the site's visitor center. The present team leaders write that "the institute team peeled away sections of 30 superimposed settlements." John C H Laughlin, Professor of Religion at Averett College, Virginia, tells us this means that the "American excavators stripped away almost completely the first four strata of the mound." Since this means everything was shovelled away back to the Iron Age, almost everything relevant to the biblical history of Israel and Judah was destroyed by the excavators!

Not only that but "because of the circumstances surrounding the American expedition—incomplete and inadequate publications and methodology used—there is considerable confusion over both the dates and content of many of the strata." Laughlin, in a pearl of understatement comments that "this made it very difficult

to know with confidence which ruins should be assigned to which levels." Omitting all this, the leaders of the latest excavation say the Institute team established the basic chronology of the city's history from the Neolithic (8000-4500 BC) to the Persian Period (539-332 BC).

To try to make something of the mess the Chicago expedition left in respect of the Israelite period (c 1150-734 BC), Yigael Yadin, of Hebrew University, dug at Megiddo in the early 1960s. From the biblical description of King Solomon's rebuilding of the city (*1 Kings* 9:15), Yadin decided that a massive city gate, fortification wall, and palace upheld the biblical descriptions of a Solomonic empire extending from its capital Jerusalem far to the north.

Today the massive stone gate is the entrance to the excavated city. A sign placed in front of it by Israeli tourist authorities reads "Solomonic gate, 970-930 BC." "Solomonic Megiddo" with its elaborate ashlar palaces—built of dressed-stones—and the "Solomonic" four-entry gates at Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer long ago became celebrated case-studies in biblical archaeology. It is a classic case of circular reasoning. The gate is from 200 years later.

## **The Latest Excavations**

In 1992, an expedition from Tel Aviv University in partnership with Pennsylvania State University and other institutions resumed large-scale excavations there to explore more of Megiddo's ancient urban plan, refine the chronology of its rise and fall, and clarify its role in biblical history. Neil Asher Silberman of *Archaeology Journal*, Israel Finkelstein and David Ussishkin of Tel Aviv University, and Baruch Halpern of Pennsylvania State University are co-directors of the current Megiddo Expedition, which also includes Loyola Marymount, the University of Southern California, Vanderbilt University, and the University of Rostock. Why has a new expedition returned to Megiddo? Because the archaeological and historical conclusions about the city are now in dispute!

The new methods of excavation and scientific testing now being applied at Megiddo offer a chance to re-evaluate how events were interpreted in biblical accounts. The current expedition is specifically interested in Megiddo's economic and political prominence. Artefacts, architecture and animal and plant remains, and patterns of agricultural settlements offer a fascinating picture of state-formation and social evolution in the Bronze Age (c 3500-1150 BC) and Iron Age (c 1150-600 BC) that does not unequivocally confirm the biblical descriptions of Megiddo's history.

The new expedition's investigations have cast doubt on the supposed rebuilding of the city by Solomon, and on the nature and extent of the united monarchy of David and Solomon. Scholars had agreed that Megiddo's six-chambered gate and adjoining city wall at the northern entrance to the city was commissioned by King Solomon in the late tenth century BC as a part of the great building project mentioned in *1 Kings* 9:15.

The date of Megiddo's massive constructions and how they fit into the city's history is so divisive that the directors of the new expedition disagree. Baruch Halpern accepts the biblical description of Solomon's rebuilding of Megiddo, and that the famous six-chambered gate and several additional palace buildings were indeed constructed during the Solomonic era, traditionally 967-928 BC. From architectural parallels and pottery analyses, Israel Finkelstein and David Ussishkin consider that the first great rebuilding of Megiddo took place

after the establishment of the northern Kingdom of Israel and not under any united monarchy of David and Solomon, though they cannot decide which king it was.

At Megiddo, Stratum IV was first dated to the days of Solomon, mainly on the basis of the constructional activities mentioned in *1 Kings* 9:15, the mention of Solomonic cities for chariots and horsemen in *1 Kings* 9:19, and the set of long pillared buildings, uniformly divided down their lengths by rows of columns and roughly hewn stone troughs, uncovered at the site and identified as stables. Many storage jars were discovered in similar buildings at other contemporary sites in Israel suggesting they were storehouses or covered bazaars.

Despite this, biblical “scholars” think it “seems clear” these buildings at Megiddo were chariot stables under the kings of Israel, because no pottery or other finds were found within them, and the arrangement of the buildings around a large courtyard “suggests an area for exercising horses.” In the 1960s, Yigael Yadin linked the pillared buildings to Stratum IVA, which was dated to the period of Omri. The Solomonic city was identified with the preceding Stratum, VA-IVB, characterized by ashlar palaces, and based on the similarity of the four-entry gates at Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer, and again the building activities of Solomon in these places in *1 Kings* 9:15. Yadin argued that the gates represent a master plan designed by Solomon’s architects. But the foundations of Yadin’s dating were built on shaky ground.

Ussishkin showed that the four-entry gate at Megiddo is Stratum IVA, later than Solomon’s days even according to the prevailing chronology. Then similar gates were found in late Iron Age II contexts, at Lachish and Tel Ira, and outside the borders of the supposed Solomonic state, at Philistine Ashdod. Finally, many moderate scholars—not only the minimalists who suspect the historicity of much of the bible—argued that the stories of David and Solomon were romances picturing an idyllic “Golden Age,” that the description of Solomon’s time is filled with later theological and ideological goals, and that the Deuteronomist account of Solomon’s reign is based on little original material.

Ussishkin and Woodhead’s excavations at Tel Jezreel support this chronological construct. Pottery from the compound dated to Omri was similar to that of Stratum VA-IVB at Megiddo. The two sites were apparently destroyed at the same time, probably in the mid-ninth century. This traps Stratum VA-IVB at Megiddo into a relatively narrow chronological slot—in the first half of the ninth century BC.

## Pottery

Finkelstein shows that the conventional dating of some levels at Megiddo is wrong by almost a century. Levels previously dated to the tenth century BC, when many biblical scholars and archaeologists assume that David and Solomon ruled, should be moved later, to the ninth century BC. This “Finkelstein Correction” would imply that massive fortifications and stone palaces at Megiddo previously attributed to Solomon’s reign might really have been the work of a later ruler, such as the ninth century King Omri. David and Solomon may at best have been earlier tribal chiefs whose reputations were greatly magnified by the biblical authors, writing hundreds of years after the events, or they may never have existed at all, as suggested by scholars dubbed the “minimalists.” The method archaeologists use to date strata in this period is by pottery, an approach Finkelstein thinks needs adjustment. Conventional dating of the monochrome and bichrome pottery puts it too early. Dating of the eleventh to tenth century BC strata had been based on proposals of Alt and Albright using Egyptian chronology. They thought the Egyptians settled the Philistines in the southern coastal plain of Canaan after the clash



between Egypt and the Sea Peoples in the eighth year of Rameses III (1175 BC). Since bichrome Philistine pottery had a long lifespan, it was dated to the twelfth to eleventh centuries BC. So strata just above the levels with Philistine pottery were dated to the tenth century BC.

In 1995, Finkelstein studied Philistine monochrome pottery, conventionally dated to c 1175-1150 BC, contesting the traditional view that shortly after their 1175 BC battle with Rameses III, the Philistines, quickly settled on and near the coast of present-day Israel and began manufacturing their characteristic style of pottery called monochrome, marking the first phase of Philistine settlement in southern Canaan. Philistine monochrome and bichrome sherds were missing at Lachish Stratum VI and Tel Sera Stratum IX, both of which were under occupation by the Egyptian Twentieth Dynasty, so the Philistines must have occupied the region only after the Egyptians had withdrawn, not during the waning years of the Egyptian presence.

Monochrome ware has not been found in any of the twentieth Dynasty Egyptian strongholds which were excavated in that region, and which lasted until the later days of Rameses III and probably even later to the days of Rameses VI, c 1135 BC as indicated by the presence of the base of a statue of him at Megiddo. Moreover, Egyptianizing pottery, characteristic of all twentieth Dynasty sites in the south, was not found in the monochrome strata. Geographically close sites can not be utterly segregated in terms of anything as common as pottery. It is inconceivable that these cities—some just a handful of kilometers from known Philistine settlements—would not have traded with them.

At two sites—Ashdod and Tel Migne—the monochrome stratum seems to be on top of the destroyed twentieth Dynasty city. The key Philistine sites used for dating the monochrome pottery could not have been established until after Egyptian domination in Palestine totally collapsed in the late twelfth century BC, and so the Philistines cannot have been settled by Rameses III in his strongholds in southern Canaan in c 1175 BC. Use of monochrome pottery only followed the collapse of Egyptian rule in southern Canaan, and should be dated to the late twelfth century BC.

The Sea Peoples did not begin settling down until 40 or more years after the 1175 BC battle. The date for Philistine monochrome pottery must be c 1135-1100 BC or later. Bichrome Philistine pottery in southern Canaan must also be lowered from late-twelfth, early-eleventh centuries BC to late-eleventh, early-tenth centuries BC, and the whole of Iron Age stratigraphy, including the tenth century BC has to be pushed on by 50 to 100 years, thus filling a pottery dark age in some southern sites, including Ashdod, and Tel Beit Mirsim.

This redating of the monochrome pottery pushes the long-lived bichrome ware, developed from the monochrome, into the late eleventh and much of the tenth century BC. The first strata to postdate the Philistine bichrome should be dated to the mid-to-late tenth century BC, and archaeological strata and pottery conventionally dated to the tenth century—the supposed era of David and Solomon—down into the ninth century BC. Finkelstein and Ussishkin have concluded from a re-analysis of the stratigraphy of the stone gate at Megiddo, which earlier excavators had identified as Solomonic, that even under the conventional chronology it was built a century later. The Finkelstein correction would make it yet another 100 years later still—a 200 year adjustment!

As for the lower anchor at Megiddo, the key is Stratum VIA—an elaborate city which was destroyed in a terrible conflagration. From the Philistine bichrome pottery, Finkelstein lowers the date of Megiddo Stratum VIA to the

tenth century BC, putting Megiddo Strata VA-IVB from being a tenth-century BC, Solomonic city into the ninth century. According to both the Oriental Institute and recent Tel Aviv University excavations, Philistine bichrome and collared-rim jars are absent, but appeared in the previous Stratum, VIB. Stratum VIA contains only a small amount of poor late Philistine pottery. Collared-rim jars were found in Stratum VI in an area with complicated stratigraphy, and the first excavators could not distinguish between the two phases of Stratum VI. The jars might have originated in Stratum VIB, or from an early phase of Stratum VI which has so far been traced only in this area. So, even on the prevailing chronology, Stratum VIA can hardly be dated in the eleventh century BC. The sherds of Stratum VIA are the last at Megiddo to contain Canaanite motifs, whence the desperate attempts to date it before the United Monarchy.

In the next two strata in the Megiddo sequence—the poor Stratum VB and the monumental Stratum VA-IVB, nearly all Canaanite features in pottery disappear, and typical Iron Age II types were introduced. A meaningful time lapse between the ceramic horizons of Strata VIA and VB is needed, hardly allowing one to place the latter before the very late tenth-century. This pushes Stratum VA-IVB into the early ninth century BC.

In the southern part of the country the key site is Tel Arad, the location of Great Arad of the Shoshenq inscription at Karnak. During this period, the Egyptian Pharaoh Shoshenq I invaded Palestine, reckoned from Egyptian records at about 926 BC, 5 years after Solomon's death, the bible says. Yet no one knows which of the destruction levels at Megiddo, and the other cities Shoshenq attacked, were his doing. The excavators of Tel Arad suggested identification of the stratum destroyed by Shoshenq with the first fortress built there in Stratum XI. But Zimhoni and Mazar, who examined the pottery of Arad in view of later, well-dated sets from Judah, concluded that Stratum XI is later than the tenth century BC. Consequently, the only stratum which can be associated with the Shoshenq campaign is Stratum XII. This means that Stratum XI at Arad and the contemporary Stratum V at Beer-sheba—the first Iron Age fortifications in the Beer-sheba Valley and in the entire territory of Judah—were built in the ninth century BC.

Finally, Finkelstein and Ussishkin cite recent excavations in Jerusalem that have failed to find any evidence of large-scale building in the tenth century BC—despite the bible's account that David established his capital there and that Solomon built an enormous temple in the city.

There is a very big problem for the traditional dating in Jerusalem. We have very minimal remains from both the tenth and ninth centuries BC.

Archaeologist Gideon Avni, Israel Antiquities Authority

## **Power and Resources**

The poorer, more isolated southern capital of Jerusalem could not have marshalled the resources and troops to extend its rule over the rich Jezreel valley. Judah was in the impoverished hill country. Its agricultural resources were limited and the herding of sheep and goats played a much larger economic role there. The first true Israelite monarch, with a fully developed state apparatus of administration and centralized planning, emerged probably not in Jerusalem but in the rich valleys and cities of the north, like Megiddo. The redating of the first monumental structures to a period after the reign of Solomon may also suggest that the development of the first full-fledged Israelite kingdom occurred under the rule of Samaritan kings like Omri or Ahab, who are pictured as sinful, idol-worshipping villains in the biblical sources, because they were native Canaanites in fact

and not the colonists from Persia who wrote the scriptures.

The contemporary records of the Assyrian Empire recognize Sirla, identified with Israel, while Yauda (Judah?) is mentioned only in passing. The Monolith Inscription of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III from the ninth century BC reports that Akha-abbu, taken to mean Ahab, contributed 2000 chariots to an anti-Assyrian coalition at the battle of Qarqar in Syria in 843 BC. This chariot force would certainly rank Israel as a formidable military power, but the victor, who built the monument, was likely to exaggerate the strength of his enemies rather than admit their weakness. Common sense dictates that Israel could not have been a serious rival to Assyria.

Nevertheless, current excavations and intensive study of the area surrounding Megiddo highlight the considerable resources and economic capability of the area from 930 to 722 BC. The city stood in rich valleys, on an active trade route, and in cultural communication with neighboring Phœnicians, Arameans and Philistines. By the eighth century BC, Megiddo seems to have become a heavily defended royal citadel devoted almost entirely to military and administrative functions. The city's impressive underground water tunnel allowed its residents access to a nearby spring even under siege conditions. A massive, stone-lined silo may have served for the centralized distribution of grain or other provisions. The supposed stables would have provided facilities for as many as 150 chariot teams—if stables is what they were.

The impressive constructions in the cities of Gezer, Megiddo and Hazor were all attributed to Solomon supposedly because they were all in the united kingdom of David and Solomon, but really they happened later under the kings of the northern Kingdom of Israel. Or were these always independent city states, or dependent on Phœnicia, not Israel?

As for Judah, in the spring of 609 BC, the bible tale is that the Judean king Josiah rode northward to confront Pharaoh Necho II and a large Egyptian force. At Megiddo, the supposed last heir of the House of David was killed in battle, as reported in *2 Kings* 23:29:

In his days Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and King Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him.

Either Josiah was a fool or the authors of the bible take its readers as fools, or deluded. The idea of Judah deliberately setting out to take on the Egyptian army is absurd. It was not a lion roaring but a mouse!

## **Radio Carbon (C-14) Results**

Seed and wood samples from the major site involved in the tenth century debate have been C-14 dated and support the new Low Chronology. Until recently wide error bands on radiocarbon dating for such recent periods as the Iron Age, often a century or more, meant the C-14 dates were useless for regnal dates, but refinements of C-14 dating techniques have reduced the uncertainty.

Samples from Stratum VIA at Megiddo—the city long believed to have prospered in the eleventh century BC—give dates that cluster decades later. Fifteen wood samples were taken from roof beams that had collapsed in the terrible fire and destruction of Stratum VIA. The C-14 dates of large timbers at best date the time when the trees used to make the beams were cut down, and for heartwood, date the time when the tree rings were being

laid down, not the date of the destruction or even the construction. Timbers, a valuable resource, were often re-used from earlier buildings, but some might have been freshly cut. Either way, a piece of charcoal from the heart of a beam might give a date hundreds of years before the date of its combustion. So, in the range of dates found, only the latest should be assigned to the age of the construction of the building or city. Six of the samples fall in the 12-eleventh centuries and can well represent reused logs. Eight of the samples fall well into the tenth century and one into the ninth. The Stratum VI city apparently dates to the tenth century BC.

These dates have been confirmed by test of parallel strata, such as Tel Hadar on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Ein Hagit near Megiddo and Tel Kinneret on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee. Grains of wheat, barley, and other plants can often be dated more accurately, because they are annual plants that would not lie around for too many years without germinating or decomposing. A Mazar describes a series of samples from the destruction of a stratum at Tel Rehov near Beth Shan which is contemporary with Megiddo's supposed "Solomonic" city, Stratum VA-IVB, and which gave mid-ninth century dates—a long time after its supposed destruction by Pharaoh Shoshenq in 926 BC. Yet, being a biblicist, Mazur ignores all convention, science and common sense, to say the opposite in a popular journal.

At Tel Rehov a major destruction layer is associated with hand-burnished pottery. Mazar told *Science* that radiocarbon dating of charred grains from this layer, which he believes corresponds to the Shoshenq invasion, gave dates ranging from about 916 to 832 BC, the older end of which he thinks correlates "reasonably well" with the timing of Shoshenq's raid. Any objective observer would note immediately that all of these dates are lower than the expected date of 926 BC, and using the rule of preferring the lowest—even burnt grains could have been burnt in hearths during the lifetime of the city not when it was destroyed—the destruction was up to 100 years after the conventionally accepted date. Mazar then points to radiocarbon dates of 1120 to 990 BC from a beam of elm wood, which he takes to show that this settlement was constructed no later than the tenth century BC.

In summary, according to Finkelstein's Low Chronology, strata which were previously dated to the eleventh century BC would now be dated to the tenth century BC. In Israel, this includes Megiddo VIA and its contemporaries, Beth-shan Upper VI, Tel Hadar, and Yokneam XVII, and in Judah, Beer-sheba VII and Arad XII. Strata which were dated to the tenth century BC should be re-dated to the ninth century BC. Therefore, in Israel Megiddo VA-IVB and its contemporaries and in Judah Beer-sheba V and Arad XI date to the ninth century. Strata which were dated to the eighth and seventh centuries BC should remain dated as such. The Low Chronology resolves some thorny problems raised by the prevailing dating. Among other things, it closes the gap of a century or more between the beginning of monumental architecture at Megiddo, and the appearance of other manifestations of developed administration in Israel and the entire Levant, such as monumental inscriptions, administrative ostraca and inscribed seals and seal impressions.

## **The Biblicist Defence**

Biblicist archaeologists claim Finkelstein has not proven his case for altering the conventional chronology. Seymour Gitin, director of the W F Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem, thinks that pottery was not necessarily exchanged between neighbouring contemporaneous sites. Gitin, who co-directed excavations at the Philistine site of Ekron, says that no monochrome pottery has been found at Gezer, a nearby Canaanite city widely agreed to have existed at the same time.

Not one sherd representing early Philistine culture has been found at Gezer. How do you explain that?

A scientist should begin with the evidence, namely that there was no shared contemporary pottery in adjacent sites, and conclude that the strata under consideration were not contemporary, rather than begin with the assumption, however widely agreed, that they “existed at the same time.”

Another claim is that the late dating does not leave enough time for the various strata up until the Assyrian conquest which are easily recognised. Amnon Ben-Tor and Doron Ben-Ami defend the traditional chronology at Hazor, devised by Yigael Yadin, and therefore a tenth century date for the buildings of Hazor Stratum X, which include the casemate wall and six-chambered gate traditionally attributed to Solomon. Ben-Tor and Ben-Ami question the reliability of ceramic dating, Jezreel’s poor condition, as well as the compression of strata.

The studies are contradictory, but Finkelstein defends his confidence in the dating of the royal enclosure at Jezreel. He had already lowered the chronology of Megiddo Strata VA-IVB from a 1992 pottery study by Zimhoni at Jezreel, and believes later work by the same author shows Hazor Stratum X is contemporary. The pottery assemblage from Jezreel, which was destroyed apparently in the middle of the ninth century BC, is identical to that from Megiddo, which according to the conventional theory was destroyed in the tenth century. It is impossible that Jezreel is tenth century, so Megiddo must be ninth. The palaces at Samaria (clearly ninth century BC) are markedly similar to those at supposedly tenth century Megiddo. The palace at Samaria built by Omri cannot be tenth century, so the palace at Megiddo must be ninth century.

In the ninth century, the greatness, the strength and the prosperity of the Omride dynasty in the northern kingdom of Israel is testified to by the Assyrians who refer to the Omride state as Beit Omri, the house—land or dynasty—of Omri. They knew there was a monarch named Omri who was the founder of the dynasty and the founder of the capital. The biblical text here is confirmed by ample extra-biblical evidence and archaeology. In the case of Solomon, it is not.

The proliferation of strata Finkelstein attributes to a period of warfare between Israel and Damascus. These Aramaean statelets were just forming at that time, and after the establishment of an Aramaean state at Damascus, the Omrides set up Samaria nearby with the inevitable clashes between them, visible in Hazor Strata X-IX. Ben-Tor rejects this on the grounds that so many strata are not found at Tel Dan even though it is nearer to Damascus. Dan in this period might have been an ally of Aram or occupied by the Damascenes, explaining this. The fragment of an Aramaean stele found unstratified at Tel Dan in 1993, if genuine, confirms Dan was an ally of Damascus not Samaria. Ben Tor accepts that there is effectively no evidence of the Aramaeans and without something more positive, there can be no strong arguments. The Assyrians under Tiglath-pileser III were more likely to have caused serious damage at Hazor than the incipient state of Damascus. William Dever adds that Finkelstein has neglected the circumstantial evidence left by the invasion of Shoshenq I in 926 BC, which he believes supports the conventional view. Egyptian inscriptions list more than 100 cities that Shoshenq supposedly conquered—including Megiddo and Gezer. Excavations of more than 25 sites on the list have identified destruction layers that many archaeologists attribute to Shoshenq’s invasion. It ought to be clear by now that “many archaeologists” using wishful thinking rather than proper evidence do not add up to a tel of beans. Since cities were commonly destroyed by fire whether by conquest or accidentally, and were not uncommonly deliberately pulled down and rebuilt for reasons of pestilence among other reasons, destruction

was commonplace.

A characteristic difference in pottery styles—a shift from a hand-burnished to a wheel-burnished finish—also characterizes some particular destruction layers. Dever believes this hand-burnished pottery is a chronological marker for the tenth century BC Shoshenq destructions. Finkelstein disagrees, arguing that many of the destruction layers usually attributed to Shoshenq should be blamed on later ninth century BC invaders.

Aviram Mazar notes that sherds from Beth Shan include ceramics in the Philistine style but from the end of the Egyptian occupation, contradicting Finkelstein. The Philistine presence in southern Canaan need not have awaited the complete withdrawal of Egypt. Mazar though is not convinced himself of the biblical empire:

I have no doubt that the description of David and Solomon in the bible is to a large extent exaggerated, but this doesn't mean you have to cancel David and Solomon as historical figures.

A Mazar

Finkelstein is willing to concede that David and Solomon might still have existed, but he is offering a sop to the biblicist faction. Even if some primitive tribal leaders called David and Solomon existed by those names at some time before Omri, they were plainly not the same as the biblical legends. The early Israelites formed much smaller political entities, restricted to smaller territories even than the small states of Judah and Israel, as indicated in the bible. The later biblical writers wanted legendary heroes and so they created them.



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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 1. The Crisis of Sacred History**  
**King David Examined**

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The early part of Iron Age II is thought to represent the “Golden Age” of the 10th century kings David and Solomon—yet its material culture is of a surprisingly low level.

*Peter James*

### **David Appears in Egypt**

King David, the killer of Goliath, the Philistine giant, and founder of the Jewish state, is such a part of our own mythology of the western world after 2000 years of enforced reading of the Hebrew scriptures we have in the Christian *Old Testament*, that it might surprise people to know that the main evidence we have that he ever lived is... the Jewish scriptures! Philip R Davies of Sheffield University says bluntly, “King David is about as historical as King Arthur”.

Surely this *is* a surprise, after all David is supposed to have become a noted person in the Ancient Near East, setting up what was briefly a substantial empire stretching from Egypt to Anatolia under his son King Solomon. Surely then, the records and correspondence of nearby nations must have said more about him, and the evidence left in his own country must have been substantial. In fact, the bible is the only written source concerning the so-called United Monarchy, and so it is the source of any historical presentation of the period. David's Tower in Jerusalem is not David's but Herod's, and David's Citadel in Jerusalem is not David's but Moslem, built by the Mamelukes and the Ottomons, though many devout religious tourists do not realize, or, will not hear, any of it.

The ancient water system of Jerusalem, of which parts remain, were thought to have been built by David. In 1995, they were shown to have been built 800 years earlier! The archaeologist, Ronny Reich, showed this using eighteenth century BC pottery associated with the complex itself (but in so doing removed large amounts of rubble, allegedly sixth century, that might itself have been valuable for dating).

The historical David is nowhere to be found in the landscape of the city most closely associated with his rule.

Amy Dockser Marcus, *Rewriting the Bible*  
(US, *The View from Nebo*)

No king called David is visible at all. Saul, David and Solomon seem not to have existed, and if they did, the bible gives them less than a century round about 1000 BC, yet the bible devotes more words to them than any other Jewish king or period. All the more curious that history outside the bible has nothing to say about these kings, even when it relates to the period in question. The evidence outside the bible of most of what is in it is hard to find. No one until recently has been bold enough to question the bible!

So far, archaeology has confirmed the existence of only the following kings of Israel and Judah—Omri, Ahab, Jehu, Jeroboam II, Pekah, Hoshea, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Manasseh—a mere nine out of 43, or ten if David is included—a Babylonian puppet, Yaukinu (Jehoiachin), who hardly ever ruled in Jerusalem, can be added, after the fall of the city—minor figures in a minor country, but David was the founder of an empire and a house that supposedly still could be traced a thousand years later. More of even the minor figures might have been expected to have been mentioned in Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian records.

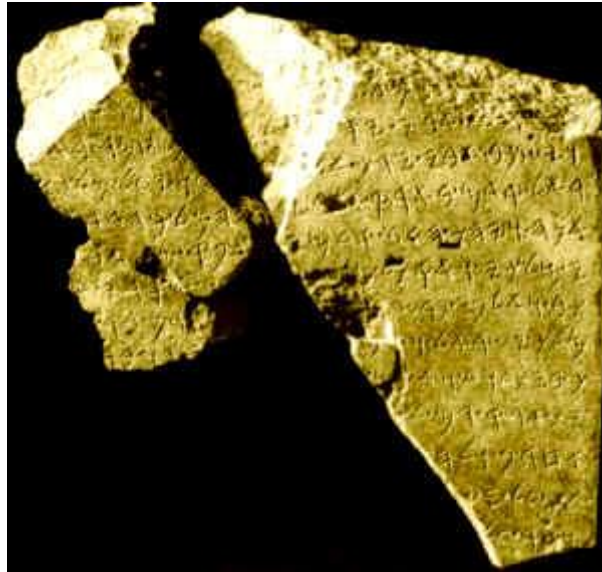
Recently, some “scholars” of biblical “history” claim that archaeological discoveries verify that David, king of Israel, was historical. The name of king David has been found on an Egyptian inscription from the tenth century BC. In conventional terms, in the 15th century BC, Pharaoh Thutmose III initiated the practice of carving on the walls of the great temple of Amun in Karnak, Upper Egypt, the names of territories he conquered, or over which he claimed dominion. The last of the Egyptian rulers to follow this custom was the tenth-century BC pharaoh Sheshonq I, who biblical scholars believe is the Pharaoh Shishak of the Bible (*1 Kgs 14:25* and elsewhere). Sheshonq supposedly campaigned in Palestine in 925 BC. In the following year, he had a vast triumph-scene, including over a hundred place-names, carved on the exterior south wall of the temple of Amun. Kenneth Kitchen of the University of Liverpool, says “David” is the likely reading of a name in Sheshonq’s hieroglyphic list. Yet, even if genuine, this is only the third time king David has been found mentioned in ancient inscriptions. Chronological revizers place Sheshonq almost 200 years after Kitchen’s date, so even if the appearance is true, it is not close to the time of the biblical David, but 300 years later, time for legends to be arising.

Kitchen jeers that this dating of Shoshenq puts David in the middle of the long and successful career of Rameses II, and to extend his empire to the Euphrates, David would also have been up against Hattusil III of the Hittites, who concluded a peace with Rameses with whom he had been warring for a long time. Thus the land between, Palestine, would have been hardly the place to found an empire. Kitchen asks:

Is it even remotely conceivable that these two formidable rulers should just sit idly by, cowering with armies in mothballs, while some upstart prince from Jerusalem’s hills calmly carved out three-quarters of their hotly-disputed territories (and revenues) for himself? This is sheer fantasy...

“It’s the way you tell ’em”. Er, no. But Kitchen cannot even begin to imagine that David is a mythical and not a real man. In fact, the abolition of Jewish mythical history and its consequences in Egyptian Chronology brings Merneptah within a few decades of Omri, the historical founder of Israel. His boasting stele, conventionally dated to about 1200 BC, would better be put about 950 BC. He was putting down the Israelites, it seems, but not long after, they succeeded in forging their own little kingdom under Omri.

### **Lack of Sure Evidence that David Existed**



Tel Dan Stele

Much vaunted as the clearest reference to David is in the ninth century BC Tel Dan inscription found in fragments of a monument in 1993 by Israeli archaeologist Avraham Biran. The strata in which it was found, needless to say, has been the subject of dispute. Information about the place of discovery of the first Tel Dan fragment is contradictory. Was it part of a wall or part of the adjacent pavement?—important information for dating, since the pavement seems to be older than the wall. Written in Aramaic, the find seems to be a victory stele celebrating the victory of an Aramean king over Judah and Israel. J J Bimson says:

We can now be fairly certain that the inscription gives a propagandistic account of the defeat of Jehoram (king of Israel) and Ahaziah (king of Judah) at Ramoth-Gilead and their subsequent deaths.

The king whose victory it celebrates is therefore Hazael. It suggests that a reinterpretation and lowering of Iron Age stratigraphy right across Palestine may be required. R Chapman says the stele, historically dated to 825-800 BC, came from a level conventionally dated to the 10th or 11th centuries BC. So, Israelite dates will have to be reduced by two centuries, making David a contemporary of Jehu—unless he is a myth, that is. Bimson's conclusion about the Tel Dan inscription is:

Its significance as a chronological anchor may turn out to be even more far reaching than its reference to the "House of David".

The fragment does not speak of "David" but to "bytdwd", interpreted as "Beit David" or the "House of David". The supposed name of David in the Egyptian inscription is a hundred years earlier, less than 50 years after David's death.

The Tel Dan fragments are suspiciously fresh in their clarity. Unlike other old stelae in which the cuts are damaged, there seems little sign of such natural wear even though the monument had been broken into pieces and incorporated into a wall where it had lain weathering for almost three millennia.

The stone was reused in a temple complex that was destroyed about 733 BC by the Assyrian, Tiglath Pileser III.

Pottery suggests it was put in place in the wall about 850 BC. It could only have been written by Aramaeans then destroyed by Israelites in this time if it had a short life of only a decade or so (Omri to Ahab). Yet the palaeographic date is a century later according to Professor Giovanni Garbini.

[Garbini](#) notes several other anomalies in the language of the text all of which suggest to him that a forger has been at work, though he does not suggest it is the archaeologist. Why does it speak all about Israelites though it is an Aramaic inscription? Hadad is mentioned once but Israel three times and, of course, “bytdwd” too. That it is written as one word by an Aramaean is odd. For a small fragment, it is peculiarly informative when such fragments of stelae are usually hard to place and interpret. Garbini considers these peculiarly fortunate elements as not conducive to accepting it as genuine. Moreover, the content is strangely parallel to the Moabite inscription as if it formed a template, except that no suitable towns in Dan were known to replace the towns of the Moabite stone. There are other similarities with the Zakur inscription, that the style seems to copy, even down to punctuation.

Nor is Garbini the only one who is suspicious. Professor Fred Cryer of Sheffield University is reported to be too. Russell Gmirkin writes online that he attended a conference at the Israel Museum where Cryer asked him to look carefully at the prominently displayed Tel Dan Inscription. Gmirkin saw scratch marks and recognized the implications. Cryer invited other experts at the seminar to look too, and about half were surprised at what they saw. The others pooh-poohed it. Gmirkin videotaped the inscription, discovering two other clues that it had been made on an already broken rock. Any competent and unbiased forensic scientist could quickly tell whether the cuts were modern but none will get the chance. Gmirkin even had to have permission to photograph it.

Garbini summarises—it isn’t the first time that we have been faced with epigraphic forgeries, all characterized by a precise ideological matrix, that of giving an extra-biblical foundation to the facts and people found in the *Old Testament*, when its essentially religious and ideological nature does not necessarily entail that those people and events described there really occurred in history, as we conceive history now. A factory for biblical forgeries has been exposed in Jerusalem, among its products being the supposed Solomon Stele, and the Jesus ossuary. The factory was working undetected for over twenty years, and many museums round the world must, the authorities believe, have many forgeries made here among their exhibits, notably bullae. It is unlikely that it is by chance that the production of epigraphic forgeries has intensified in inverse proportion to the progressive decline of Albrightian optimism regarding the confirmation that facts provided by “biblical archaeology” bring to the text of the Bible.

The French palaeographer, André Lemaire, claims an even less clear reference to the “House of David” in the long-known (discovered in 1868) but still not completely deciphered stele of king Mesha of Moab (also called the Moabite Stone), which is contemporaneous with the Tel Dan Stele. This also might refer to the “House” but the reading is unclear. Worse, the reading of “David” depends on a reconstruction of the initial letter of the name. It is likely to be “d” but no one can be sure—except Lemaire! “House of David” could mean, not a dynasty, but those (people) who owe allegiance to the *God* David and worship him at his temple (house). In a similar way, Israel could be a word meaning sons of the God El.

The new evidence from Sheshonq’s lists is that a place name in the lists is “hydbt dwt”. The first word means “highland” or “heights”. The question is how we should read the second term, “dwt”.

The first letter is “d”. The second letter seems to be “w”, the equivalent of the Hebrew letter “waw”, which can be read as the long vowel “o” or as the consonant “v”. Both usages are found in the Sheshonq list (and in Hebrew generally). The third letter is clearly a “t”. Thus the word could theoretically be read “doot” or “dvt” enunciated as “davit”. Neither makes any sense except as a proper name.

Could the reading “davit” really be “David?” Kitchen makes the case that it can—and that it is. He has found a reference in another Semitic language in which “t” replaces the final “d” in the name of King David. This occurs in a sixth century AD Ethiopic inscription from South Arabia. The reference is unmistakably to the biblical king David. It appears in a victory inscription by an Ethiopic ruler from Axum who had invaded South Arabia. In celebrating his triumph, the ruler cited two psalms (19 and 65) and named David in this connexion. David is spelled “Davit” exactly as in the Sheshonq list.

Kitchen explains that the mention of the “Heights of David” makes sense in the Sheshonq list of toponyms. Before he became king, David was a fugitive active in this area. He fled from King Saul and was joined by his fellow tribesmen and fugitives until he had a force of 400 men. His first stop was at Philistine Gath, whose ruler he would later serve. From Gath, David went to Mizpeh of Moab. From there he returned to Judah, by which time his force had increased to 600 men. He roamed about in the wilderness of Ziph, including the Hill of Hachilah, in the wilderness of Maon, in the wilderness and heights of Engedi, near the Dead Sea, and in the Arabah, the valley south of the Dead Sea, always escaping from Saul’s men. Finally, David made an alliance with the Philistine king of Gath, who gave David the city of Ziklag ( *1 Sam* 21-30). No one knows where Ziklag was, but it must be near the Negev if not in it.

The eleven rows of Sheshonq’s list of conquests is divided into three main sections, differentiated geographically. The apparent reference to David occurs in the second block of rows which are sites in south Judah and the Negev. Another name in this row is “the Terrain of Tilwan (or Tilon)”. So “the Heights of David” seems to follow this structure. However, for a long time scholars thought they also saw a “field of Abraham” in the list but that is now rejected. Interpretations are far from certain.

Nevertheless, Kitchen thinks it is not surprising that a place in this region would be named the “Heights of David”, given David’s importance and his association with the place. Kitchen concludes:

I do not claim certainty, but there is at least a high degree of probability. “David” here is nothing too spectacular.

## **David as Legend**

That then is a summary of the latest and earlier bits of archaeological evidence for the existence of king David. Because the saga of David occurs in the *Holy Book* it has rarely been understood as anything less than true history, but the curious lack of concrete evidence for such an amazing soldier casts doubt upon its historical truth.

The situation is quite like that of Jesus—everyone believes it is true yet the evidence amounts to some books written by people with a keen interest in propagating the truth of the myth. Indeed the bible is full of similar myths unsupported by historical or archaeological evidence that no “scholars” bother to question because they are committed religionists, bound by their own faith, fears and paymasters. There is no unequivocal evidence

outside the scriptures for:

- ☐ Moses and the events of Mount Sinai where he received the Ten Commandments;
- ☐ for the flight from Egypt by the Israelites;
- ☐ for a battle of Jericho where the walls came tumbling down because any town there at the time had no walls;
- ☐ for the military conquest of Canaan.

Not that David is necessarily purely mythical. He is possibly a legend rather than a myth, but either way, his exploits are much larger than his life. This is typical of myth and legend. No one knows who king Arthur was, yet volumes of astonishing mythology have been built around this romantic figure. The same applies to William Tell and Robin Hood, both likely to be entirely mythical figures of romantic legend. If there is a real man at the core of any of these myths, he has been quite hidden by all that has accreted about him.

Isn't it likely that David is the same? Possibly some Canaanite bandit, got a local name for himself and songs were written about him. Over the years the songs and the exploits grew and the central figure achieved god-like proportions. Amihai Mazar, a senior archaeologist of Hebrew University, which takes a traditional stance on biblical history, is a strong biblicist who upholds the bible's stance on David and Solomon. It is just that the might and grandeur of the United Monarchy was exaggerated.

Perhaps, he began as a god, then became personified, just as the Hebrew Almighty God was also much more human in stories meant to be primitive than the more refined Ormuzd figure of the post-exilic Jewish Priesthood. David is introduced as a minstrel in the court of Saul entertaining the king, but Saul has forgotten him when he suddenly appears as a shepherd with a sling to take on the mighty Philistine champion, Goliath. Later, it turns out that a warrior called Elhanan really killed Goliath, and for doing it was promoted to be one of David's 30 "men of valour".

Achish is the ruler of Gath who shelters David for sixteen months when he is a warrior on the run. Later again, David took Gath but later still, 4-5 years later, Achish is still the king of Gath.

Most Christians and Jews are not interested in these contradictions in God's Word, and those crazies who call the bible "inerrant" spend a lot of time inventing hidden history to explain them. The historian ought to look quizzically at these contradictions and wonder whether any of the supposed sacred history is reliable, and, if some of it is, how do we know what it is. The two verses *1 Kg 5:1* and *4* are in different places in the *Septuagint* from their places in the Masoretic text, meaning that when the *Septuagint* was translated there was no final agreement on where these two passages should be. It implies they had been late additions.

The story of how David got the throne of Saul is a true one, but not of David. It is told by king Idrini of Alalakh in a fifteenth century BC inscription on his monumental statue.

David built his empire by conquering the surrounding people (*2 Sam 8*), the Philistines, Moabites, Elamites, Ammonites and Amalekites, not to mention the Aramaeans who appear as an afterthought. The strange thing is that Saul fought all of the same people (*1 Sam 14:47*), Moabites, Edomites, Ammonites, Aramaeans and Philistines, and "wherever he turned, he put them to the worse". Saul fights and is victorious but ends up a



failure, whereas David has the same victories and ends up an emperor! For the believer, it is God's providence, no doubt, but for the historian it looks for all the world as if Saul's exploits have been used to magnify and justify a newer myth of David.

## Semantics of "David"

Hershel Shanks in *Biblical Archaeology Review* tells us that few scholars take seriously the suggestion by Philip Davies that "dwd" in the Dan stele should be read "Dood", referring to a hitherto unknown deity. Kenneth Kitchen, the discoverer of the putative Egyptian reference to the Heights of David treats the suggestion in the bent scholar's typically puerile manner:

Surely the time has now come to celebrate Dod's funeral—permanently! There is not one scintilla of respectable, explicit evidence for his/her/its existence anywhere in the biblical and ancient Near Eastern world. No ancient king ever calls himself "beloved of Dod"; no temple of Dod has ever been found, and clearly identified as such by first-hand inscriptions. We have no hymns to Dod, no offering-lists for Dod, no published rituals in any ancient language for Dod, no statues of Dod, no altars, vessels, nor any other ritual piece or votive object dedicated to Dod as a clear deity. Why? Because he/she/it never existed in antiquity... Dod is a dud deity, as dead as the Dodo—so let's dump him/her/it in well-deserved oblivion, now and henceforth!

Doubtless this is the attempt of a clever man to be funny, but in truth it shows him up as a fool. Davies's proposal is not stupid and is probably the true explanation of the legend of David, and everything that Kitchen says to disparage Dod can be applied to David if the scriptures are taken to be romance not history.

Kitchen takes advantage of the silly sound of "Dod", which we will inevitably pronounce with a short vowel, like the surname of another puerile comedian from Liverpool called Ken. The vowel represented by "w" is long, an "oo" sound, doubtless the reason we call it "double-u" which is "uu" pronounced "oo". We find it in English in words like "who" which is pronounced "hoo", or in "woman" which is really the same word as "human" or "'oo-uman'" (cf Italian "Uomo"). So, the word "dwd" is not "dod" but "dood".

Kitchen is a great Egyptologist and knows of no temple to the god, Dood, anywhere in the ancient near east, evidently giving no thought to the possibility that the Israelites or Canaanites who wrote about their hero or god, Dood, might have been pronouncing in their own fashion the name of a god known by a different pronunciation elsewhere. Since the scene is not far from Egypt and the area, as Kitchen points out, was often under Egyptian occupation, perhaps the god, Dood, was originally Egyptian.

The Egyptian god who immediately springs to mind with a similar name is, in Greek form, Thoth or originally Djehuty. The "th" is close in pronunciation to "d" and the Egyptian tells us it is hard rather than soft as the Greek suggests. We pronounce the vowel short but the Egyptian tells us it was long—"hu". The final consonant, from the Egyptian, is less lisped than the Greek suggests. Censorinus (c 238 AD) writes in confirmation (*De Die Natali* 18), "*quem vocant Aegyptii Thouthi*", being "which the Egyptians call Thouth". The word "dwd" might then have been pronounced as "jude" or "dude". Doubtless this is how "Dwd" was pronounced, and the country of "Dwd" would have been Judah. In Egypt, Thoth is often depicted as a scribe, perhaps leading to the idea that David was a cultured man who wrote psalms.

Thoth is also associated with the moon. Perhaps Dood was also, so that Solomon and Dood represent the sun and the moon. And, yes, there is very little concrete evidence of a magnificent Hebrew king called Solomon, either. Both David and Solomon reigned for 40 years, but no one will deny that 40 is a magic number in the Hebrew mythology, indeed, in the mythology of the ancient near east. This alone shows that both these monarchs were being magnified in their legends, just as Arthur and Robin Hood were.

Kitchen identifies Dood with “dwt” on his Amun temple wall and elsewhere. Is it significant or merely a coincidence that the Egyptian for Divine was “dwat”. The identification of these two words with David, virtually cries out that David was originally a god.

It will be no accident that David and Divine look to have the same root. We are talking about a time in history when the Indo-Europeans had rampaged all around effecting everyone from Ireland to India. One of the marks they made everywhere was in language—they originally spoke Sanskrit, and this is the root language of many of the languages of this area until today.

Divine comes from the Sanskrit “daiva”, in Persian “daeva” or “deva”, originally meaning a shining one and therefore a god. Zoroaster made the “devas” into “devils” in the interests of monotheism, raising Ormuzd to the position of the Almighty God. The Hindus have “devatas” which also are gods or lesser gods—spirits and “divyas” which are supernatural powers.

“Deva” is related to the Sanskrit word “dyaus” which the Greeks pronounced as “zeus” and the Italians as “deus” or Jupiter because “Dyaus Pitar” was the Sanskrit “God the Father”.

No doubt our scholarly friends will tell us that the Hebrews were not Aryans but Semites, speaking quite a different language. Of course, the Semitic languages are different from the Indo-European group but many words were exchanged between the two groups at this time, especially in the ancient near east where the two sets of peoples had come into contact and rivalry.

The similarity between David and divine is reflected elsewhere in Hebrew. “Davak” means “devoted to God” and, in the related Semitic language, Arabic, “Du’a” or “da’wa” is to pray. Indeed, in Yiddish, “davven” is also to pray.

Kitchen makes a joke about the “beloved of Dod” presumably because it sounds daft and he knows that, in Hebrew, Dood (David) means “beloved” or “lover”. Who would be more beloved than your god or national hero? Or perhaps David began as a fertility god and was therefore literally a lover.

It is our habit to call our god by the name God. If “dood” originally was a Canaanite word for a god, perhaps the Canaanites of the time gave the name to their own national god. There were many gods in the world then and in Palestine too, as the scriptures repeatedly tell us, although the mindless monotheists cannot understand it. The god who came to be the god of the Jews and eventually the Christians was probably not the god of the Exodus, who was represented by the image of a bull, or a serpent or a smoking pillar.

Perhaps one of the gods they took from the period of Egyptian colonization, they called Thoth, but pronounced

“dood” and later gave heroic deeds. The Canaanites had a god they called Hadad, possibly meaning “The Loved One”. Wherever, he came from “Dood” was, to judge by semantics, a god, and the fact that he was reduced to the hero of a national saga, does not prove otherwise. Kitchen should stop joking and do his job properly, looking for the identity of Dood in other nations. When he finds him, he will have the answer to his fatuous questions about temples, shrines and so on devoted to “Dood”. The very word “devoted” might be proof that “Dood” was a widespread name for God in ancient times. Many such words precede their supposed derivation.

That his deeds were magnified in typical epic fashion is proved even in the scriptures themselves. David’s greatest heroic deed was killing the Philistine champion, Goliath. Or was it? the Holy Book itself does not know. *2 Samuel* tells us it was Elhanan who killed the giant. Common sense, but not absurd belief, should convince us that someone has attributed Elhanan’s deed to David, the hero. That is how legends grow. Legendary deeds are never transferred to lesser men!

Incidentally, while Kitchen is joking about Dod being as dead as a dud dodo or whatever it was, does he realize that One of David’s 30 champions was called Dodo, doubtless a variant or diminutive of Dood? I suppose we must assume that a scholar like him must know, but he sounds as though he did not. That is a hazard for clever people trying to be funny.

## **David and Solomon**

The Persians were intent on setting up a theocracy but there had been a period of monarchy in Israel and the administrator-priests had to explain it within their theocratic historical framework. If God’s people wanted a king then they should have a king to teach them a lesson. Saul’s history was written as a warning that a theocracy should not want kings. The institution of the monarchy in *1 Samuel* chapters 7-13 was shown as a blasphemy against God leading to innumerable punishments, the overthrow of the monarchy and “Exile” (if there ever was one). Only the saviour of the Jews, Cyrus, allowed righteous Jews to “return” to their homeland!

Saul is depicted as a bad king, incompetent and disobedient to God. He reigned only two years according to *1 Samuel* 13:1, and then God replaced him with his own choice. God designates David as king and the Merlin of the time, Samuel, anointed him.

Caetano Minette de Tillesse thought that the stories of the accession of David and Solomon served the purpose of unifying the disparate tribes of Israel. The author thinks the histories are genuinely tenth century BC because no later editor could have had the aim of uniting an already united kingdom. That is plainly false. The kingdom was not united after the “return” as the Bible makes clear and the Persian administrators had a purpose in using a historical romance to give a basis to unity. The later Hellenistic editors had even more reason at the time of the setting up of the independent Judah by the Hasmonaeans. The core of the romance might be a tenth century romance but the style alone is sufficient to show that it has been edited by a refined editor at a much later date. The obvious times were during the priesthood of the “second” temple and more especially during Hasmonaean times.

The stories of Solomon’s and David’s accessions, from *1 Samuel* 4:1b to *1 Kings* 8, are strictly parallel to one another. The story of the Ark is the framework of both histories. These romances are reminiscent of the Arthurian

legends in which the heroes are replaced by David and Solomon, Samuel is Merlin and the Ark is the Holy Grail. The accession of David starts with the disaster of the Ark of Israel being taken by the Philistines. The Ark of the God of War, "the Lord of hosts", cannot save Israel from its enemies. The symbolism is that the foreign aggressors have usurped the god of Israel. The tide of history was to nationhood ( *1 Sam* 8:5) but God was the proper king of Israel and he instructs Samuel to make it clear what hardships having a king will mean to them ( *1 Sam* 8:7-8). Kingship is here tied to apostasy and that is what the Maccabees claimed to be fighting. All of this is expressed in terms of some early story of tribal nomads determining to be a people.

While the tenth century core might have had some substance, the later editors had their own purpose. The country had to be unified but the priests wanted a theocracy so that they were the real rulers, and the kings were disparaged. The fate of Israel was bracketed between the loss of the Ark to the Philistines for lack of a king, and the fall of the City to the Babylonians through the faults of the kings. "Exile" was blamed on the wrongs of the kings so that the priests could rule from the temple. It suited the Persians, of course, who preferred priests to princes, and the later Maccabees assumed the priesthood anyway. The Deuteronomic editor plainly mixed the bitter experience of the historic kingship into chapters 8 and 12 of *1 Samuel*, and the Maccabaeian editor slotted in the rebellious family in this story, over 1000 years earlier in history, calling him Phinehas instead of Mattathias.

Saul's reign was a failed attempt at kingship that ended in disaster for Israel ( *1 Sam* 31). But the Merlin-like kingmaker, Samuel, had already anointed David, in the name of God, to replace Saul as king to deliver Israel from its enemies. David was crowned, conquered Jerusalem and brought the Ark to Zion. The successful king had to be the choice of the priestly god, Yehouah, although the barely united people of the time worshipped their own different gods, in fact.

The priests inadvertently made a rod for their own backs. They wrote that David brought the Ark of God into the temple to give the legitimacy of God to priestly endeavours in the second temple. The Ark was the safeguard of Israel but David became the protector and saviour of the Ark. The first king approved by God, and supposedly the head of the dynasty, became a god himself—if he was not already—expected to return as the Messiah and save Israel anew.

The return of the Ark to Jerusalem justified David's accession as king and the basis of the temple priesthood. Where the story of David's accession ends, the story of Solomon's accession begins. David left the Ark in a tent in Jerusalem, presumably because God lived with his people in a tent while the Israelites were in the wilderness. But the priests wanted to justify their temple and so a tent was not suitable for the Ark of God. Just as David had been divinely chosen through the prophet Samuel, so Solomon was chosen through the prophet Nathan to complete David's work by housing the Ark in a solid and immovable building. *1 Kings* 8:15-20 notes explicitly that all is now completed as "promised".

The accession of David is disturbed by the struggles of Saul and David and the accession of Solomon is disturbed by the revolt of Absalom, which forced David to flee, just as he had fled from Saul. Both cases end in a battle ( *1 Sam* 31; *2 Sam* 18) in which Saul and Absalom die, opening the way for the accession of David and Solomon respectively. Note the name Absalom who had to die!

Obviously, the events of David's accession are duplicated in the accession of Solomon. This should be sufficient

to prove that we are not dealing with history here but romance.

## Whose House?

The priests were interested in creating the idea that the House of God was the temple and not the House (dynasty) of David. The “prophecy” (*2 Sam 7*), David’s prayer (*2 Sam 8*) and Solomon’s prayer (*1 Kg 8*) all play on the word “House”.

In *2 Samuel 7*, “house” initially means temple (which David had the “intention” of building). But Nathan says that David will not build this “house”, but that the Lord would build a “house” (descendant, dynasty) for him. This descendant (Solomon) will build the house (temple) for God. David’s prayer (*2 Sam 8*) uses the very same word “house” seven times, now with the meaning of descentance (Solomon), and *1 Kings 8* also uses the same word with the meaning of the temple, which David could not build but which Solomon carried on to its completion.

So the word “house” is used: eight times in *2 Samuel 7*; seven times in *2 Samuel 8*; and eight times in *1 Kings 8*, where it has the two meanings: the temple which should be built, and the descendant who would build the temple. The priests wanted to sow doubt in the minds of a people who considered themselves of the House of David (probably a memory of when David was their local god) and make them think that the new god, Yehouah, always meant the “house” to have been the temple. Even more so, they wanted to confuse the use of the name of the city which previously had been Beth Salem.

The stories of the accession of David and Solomon were composed with an overt apologetic aim—to justify the setting up of the second temple priesthood as the will of God, and later the justification for the free state of the Hasmonaeans. God who used to reside in a tent now lived in the temple. The earlier Hebrew gods or heroes, David and Solomon, became the heroes of the saga and the founders of the Jewish state and its temple. The aim was to justify the temple but it succeeded so well that it gave credence to the make-believe history and David and Solomon began to be seen as real people in an Israelite Golden Age that never existed.

## David’s Empire?

The dreamer’s history of Israel, mainly a paraphrase of the bible with a commentary, was written by John Bright. This famous Christian historian thinks that Israel became a “ranking power of the contemporary world” “within a century”. Solomon had an empire from Sinai to the Euphrates (*1 Kgs 4:21; Gen 15:18; Dt 1:7,11:24; Josh 1:4; 2 Sam 8:3; 1 Chr 18:3*), a meaningful area, giving him immense wealth, and a reputation for wisdom. By a coincidence, it is the precise area of the Assyrian and then Persian province of “Beyond the River”, Abarnahara. The empire was built by his father, David, and crumbled suddenly, for such a power, five years after he died when the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak invaded Judah and captured it (*2 Chr 12*).

It had notionally lasted for about 70 years and must have made its mark, but empires do not rise and fall in less than a century, leaving no trace at all except for exaggerated fairy stories. All fairy stories are exaggerated because they are not true. Empires have administrative buildings, bills of trade, monumental inscriptions, seals, skilled craftsmen making valuable objects that inevitably sometimes get lost and are later found by archaeologists. Not this one.

With his power and wealth Solomon built the temple (1 Kgs 6), the Royal Palace (1 Kgs 7:2-12), the walls of Jerusalem, the Millo (an unknown structure) (1 Kgs 9:15,11:27), royal cities at Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer (1 Kgs 9:15,17), store cities and cities for his horsemen and chariots (1 Kgs 9:19). Solomon had 1400 chariots, 12,000 horsemen and had 40,000 stables for his horses (1 Kgs 4:26;10:26). This was a substantial army and could only have been maintained by a substantial population and economy.

The numbers of warriors (2 Sam 24:9) raised by Israel (800,000) and Judah (500,000), even if these are all of the able bodied men in both countries, requires a population of 6 or seven million all together. Obviously, if these are only a proportion of the able bodied men, then the total population must be proportionately larger. The population supported by Palestine under the Turks—before agricultural development and therefore supported by the sorts of agricultural methods that were available in biblical times—was only one million. The country could not have supported much more than this number using traditional biblical farming methods.

The Israelites had a tiny population—55,000 on the West Bank in 1000 BC, according to I Finkelstein, and no more than 250,000 in the whole of Palestine, according to McEvedy and Jones—and no natural advantages. Careful site surveys and calculations by M Broshi and I Finkelstein estimate the population of Israel about the time of the fall of Samaria to have been 350,000, and Judah to have been 110,000. By the Persian period the population of Judah was less than 35,000.

The hill country of Judah simply never could have had a sufficient population to support armies to conquer the whole of the Levant. Bright seriously thinks that an impoverished, depopulated colony of Egypt could compete with Egypt (5 million) and Assyria (2 million). Biblicists like to point to the weakness of Egypt and Assyria at the time, but these were massive countries compared with Israel and even in a weakened state could hardly have tolerated, without mention, roaring mice forming incipient empires on their borders. No serious historian could contemplate it, even supposing those great powers were in temporary decline.

Had he been talking about Persia, it would have been believable. Persia could draw upon the large population (2.5 to 4 million, according to C McEvedy and R Jones in *Atlas of World Population History*) of the Iranian plateau and the skills in metallurgy of its peoples. Historians not besotted by the Holy Ghost must smell a rat, but for believers the rat is in the Holy Book so has the odour of sanctity.

The kingdom of David could never have even conquered the north of Canaan which was far more populated with more sophisticated people. If the empire of David was built by alliances and treaties rather than by warfare, it still fails to convince. Alliances were built under the threat of arms or through some perceived advantage, but what was it that made the nations to the north want to form alliances under the suzerainty of the feeble Israelites? J M Miller and J Hayes (*A History of Ancient Judah and Israel*) of biblical historians only in 1986 begin to suspect something is phony about the biblical account of early Israel. They criticize the narratives of David and Solomon's reigns, describing them as "folk legend", "not to be read as historical record". It is an advance even if otherwise they paraphrase the bible as much as any other "biblical historian". Separately, Miller has admitted that there is no evidence for the monarchies of David and Solomon outside the bible, so everything that is written or speculated about these monarchs depends entirely on the bible.

Solomon is supposed to have married the daughter of a pharaoh, a privilege that was denied to the powerful



kings of the Hittites. Moreover, no Egyptian record of this magnificent liaison has ever been found. It is true that later Pharaohs did marry off some of their princesses, but the biblical reference here shows, if anything, that it was written when the practice was known, not when it was unusual.

In the whole of the area supposedly covered by the kingdom of these mighty monarchs extant remains of it are “very poor”. Kathleen Kenyon says that “the archaeological evidence is meagre in the extreme”. The poverty of the Palestinian hill country is shown by the low incidence of expensive imports compared with neighbouring ANE countries. Gold objects are notably rare. The Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian and Hittite peoples in the ancient Near East left evidence of their empires including tablets or papyri, art and inscriptions on buildings and monuments. Yet the empire of David and Solomon is not mentioned in any Ancient Near Eastern source. Monumental reliefs and statues, palaces, ivories, jewelry and all the normal signs of the sophistication required to run an empire are lacking.

E Leach (E Leach and D A Laycock Eds, *Structuralist Interpretation of Biblical Myth*) says:

There is no archaeological evidence for the existence of these heroes or for the occurrence of any of the events with which they were associated. If it were not for the sacredness of these stories, their historicity would certainly be rejected.

Leach also spots that we have in many of these biblical traditions, conflicts that reflect competing factions in the Persian period, expressed as a mythical allegorical history.

Nothing can be unequivocally attributed to Solomon, nor is there any trace of a great culture that he developed. Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer have been widely excavated and palaces, temples and fortifications have been found, but none mention Solomon and the important buildings seem to be dated before his supposed time and after. Cartouches of the Eighteenth Dynasty Pharaoh, Amenhotep III, were common in deposits where seals of Solomon might have been expected.

The Davidic empire seems to be modelled on great empires of the Ancient Near east, notably the neo-Assyrian or neo-Babylonian, showing that the whole was composed after those empires died, when they were incorporated into the empire of the Medes and Persians. In its sudden emergence from a poor hill country after the wanderings of its people, the empire of David is a bijou image of the swift emergence of the Persian empire in the sixth century BC, after the Persians had wandered for several hundred years. The Persians had migrated, like the Israelites into their ultimate homeland on an arid plateau, and then had quickly become an empire through the military skill of Cyrus the Great, whom David parallels in his similar deeds. David is shown as an Israelite Cyrus defeating neighbouring Goliaths. Furthermore, the empire's extent is the precise extent of the Persian satrapy of Abarnahara.

The expression used to delineate the north eastern boundary of the Empire of David (1 Kgs 4:21,24) is the expression, Eber-ha-Nahar, “The Shores of the River” (Euphrates), used by the Assyrians from the seventh century onwards (perhaps earlier) and then by the Persians—as Abarnahara. Since there seems little reason why the Assyrians should have been involved in writing the Jewish scriptures, the conclusion is that the words came from Persian writers. It was therefore written from the fifth century BC. The absence of any references in ancient near eastern annals to such supposedly great kings as David and Solomon makes this fifth century

work begin to look like deliberate myth-making.

The Philistines of the scriptures seem to be of the same culture as the Israelites of Canaan and seem to speak the same Semitic language as no suggestions occur of problems of understanding, interpretation or translation. They also worship Dagon, a corn god, considered by the Canaanites as a son of Baal. Since the Philistines were among the “Peoples of the Sea” who only occupied the coastal area from about the time of Rameses II when the biblical Israelites too were moving into Canaan, they can hardly have had linguistic and cultural identity or even similarities with the hordes of escaping slaves.

By the time of the Persians 700 years later, the Philistines had been culturally assimilated into the regional culture of the Semitic Canaanites. Furthermore, the original Sea People at the time of Rameses were essentially mercenary soldiers, not settlers, selling themselves to the Pharaohs for their military skills. The Egyptian texts depict relationships between Philistines and Egyptians as mainly peaceful, as would be expected if they were allies. Doubtless, it is because they were allies of the Egyptians that the Persians showed the Philistines as the enemies of the Israelites. The episode of David and Goliath (*1 Sam 17*) is revealed as of Persian provenance from its vocabulary.

David conquers Jerusalem and brings the Ark there having retrieved it from the Philistines who had captured it but suffered so much misfortune as a consequence that they had abandoned it. David's kingdom however is shown as friendly with the Phœnicians, who were allies of the Persians in the fifth century and the suppliers of their sailors and navies. Finds of ostraca and the occasional formal inscription testify to Phœnician activity all over the country, and as far south as Kuntillet Ajrud in the Negev. Quite possibly, the wealthy people in the Palestinian hills were Phœnician land owners—perhaps often absent, as they were in Ireland in the nineteenth century—and merchants arranging for wine, oil and sheep to be despatched to Tyre and Sidon, or on into Egypt. Who says there are no anachronisms in the Jewish scriptures? There are many but the scholars are too embarrassed to point them out. Maachah, David's wife was a daughter of Talmai, a meaningless name in Hebrew because it is plainly Ptolemy, the Greek name of one of Alexander's generals. David's court life and succession (*2 Sam 9-20*; *1 Kg 1-2*) was not an original composition of the time, supposedly by the court historian. It is pure fiction, a novel written for politico-religious reasons—they will revive David's glory only by being obedient—and not completed until the Hellenistic period, 800 years after the events it pretends to describe.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 1. The Crisis of Sacred History**  
**Solomon & His Temple Examined**

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*Israel Finkelstein:* I have not seen a sherd with a label, "I was made by Solomon". Maybe you have. Have you?  
*Hershel Shanks:* No.

## **Solomon**

The evidence for the empire of Solomon is deceptively abundant. It is abundant in the Jewish scriptures and nowhere else! Yet, biblicist archaeologists, who would be struck off the register if they were doctors, have doctored so much archaeological evidence that religious punters today think Solomon is a well established historical figure. You will often meet expressions like "a wall of the time of Solomon" as if there was no doubt about it because the name Solomon was scratched on every brick. What these "scholars" mean is a wall dated to the tenth century BC when they believe that Solomon lived!

The idea of a major state, let alone an empire, centred on Jerusalem in the tenth century BC has been increasingly disputed in recent years. Growing numbers of biblical historians and archaeologists have added weight to the call for a complete reappraisal of the Davidic and Solomonic United Monarchy. The search for the tenth century is now one of the most critical areas of debate among archaeologists.

Margaret Gelinas, a recent scholar, confirmed just before the turn of the millennium that the bible is the only source of information about the so-called "United Monarchy". A Mazar (*Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*) writes:

The time of Saul hardly finds any expression in the archaeological record... The archaeological record concerning David's reign is also poor and ambiguous.

Donald Redford, an author and leading authority on the era, writes in frustration at the absence of anything to verify the biblical stories:

Such topics as the foreign policy of David and Solomon, Solomon's trade in horses or his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter must remain themes for midrash and fictional treatment.

Philip Davies (*In Search of Ancient Israel*) discounts any possibility of...

...a Davidic empire administered from Jerusalem... The range of indices considered by Jamieson-Drake make it necessary for us to exclude the Davidic and Solomonic monarchies, let alone their empire, from a non-biblical history of Palestine.

The spring 1990 issue of the prestigious journal, the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, was entirely devoted to deciding which archaeological levels of the ancient cities of Palestine belonged to the time

of king Solomon. The scholars were unable to agree on a conclusion. G E Wright can summarize:

No discovery has been made in Jerusalem which can be dated... to the time of David and Solomon.

B S J Isserlin, like the others, finds it hard to forget his bible, but he cannot escape the reality of archaeology, so he claws for something desperately in these clips, all from just three pages concerning Solomon in his book, *The Israelites*:

There are hints... A hint of Solomonic architectural magnificence...

...the bible has much to say when describing Solomon's temple and palace buildings, but no parts of them can now be identified...

...new palaces belonging to later kings from Manasseh onwards, although they still have to be found.

Solomon extended... his royal palace complex—including the temple (their exact location is unknown) ...

...the exact limits of Solomon's royal enclosure are not known. It is agreed, though, that it was very large... the effort involved must have been enormous... no wonder we are told it took Solomon 13 years to build his residence.

At present there is no archaeological proof that this did happen.

The absence of any historical confirmation of a Solomon simply does not deter these scholars. God has told them there was a Solomon, so what scholarship can contradict it? Isserlin is like that, but he is honest enough to intersperse his belief with the occasional doubt:

Our knowledge of Samaria and Jerusalem is at present pretty patchy.

All told, our information is still patchy.

Who would have guessed? There was quite obviously a tenth century BC, but what no one has yet been able to prove is that any emperors called David and Solomon lived in it... or any other time for that matter—unless David means Adad (Adad-nirari) and Solomon means Shalman (Shalmanezar), Assyrian kings who ruled successively in the ninth century. Commonly we read these scholars saying things like, a wall “built by Asa”, “the Solomonic age”, in “the territory of the tribe of Manasseh”, and many more such things based on no scholarship other than an uncritical belief and detailed reading of the biblical myths. Any books that speak of the “time of David” or the “time of Solomon” should be burnt as religious propaganda. Respectable historians do not refer times in history to mythical figures or places. They do not talk of the “time of Hercules” and we can be certain that any historian that spoke of the “time of Atlantis” would be instantly dismissed or certified. Yet these biblical figures, David and Solomon, are no less mythical.

The source of such detailed reporting in the scriptures of 1000 BC was, the biblical experts told us, the official historian of the court of king David, like the work itself an entirely fictional invention. Diehard Christian apologists will still believe this but honest scholars have declared it a forgery, written long after the Persians set up their temple state of Yehud. The central characters, David and Solomon, can barely be admitted even as myths. Nor does, Gelinas tells us, “the intensive building activity attributed to Solomon in the biblical account” find any expression in the material record at Jerusalem.

No trace of the temple of Solomon has ever been found. Not a single votive offering. Be assured that *nothing*

at all that has been found under the earth or in ancient archives can certainly be assigned to Solomon. Though architecture and artefacts corresponding to the tenth century BC are routinely ascribed to the “period of Solomon”, absolutely nothing found has ever said anything about a king Solomon!

According to *1 Kings* 9:10ff, Hiram, king of Tyre, was alive and lived for 20 more years after the temple was started. That was in Solomon’s fourth year, so he died in Solomon’s 24th year. The same Hiram was a pal of David, Solomon’s father, “all his days” (*1 Kg*5:1), and built a palace for him in Jerusalem. David supposedly reigned 40 years including 33 in Jerusalem, so, even if only the 33 in Jerusalem count as “all his days”, Hiram reigned for 57 years. It is not an impossible reign, admittedly, even for those days—Rameses II reigned longer—but Josephus, citing the *Annals of Tyre*, says Hiram reigned only 34 years and died when he was 53!

Josephus had noticed the discrepancy and dropped the long friendship of Hiram and David, because of the need to retain the friendship with Solomon. Despite this, Josephus cannot give dates that match the biblical ones regarding the building of the temple. Citing the *Annals of Tyre*, Josephus says the temple of Solomon was built 143 years and eight months before Tyre founded Carthage. Josephus seems to be trying to harmonize the *Annals of Tyre* with the bible to claim that the *Annals of Tyre* verified the bible. It is as if a biblicist claimed that, from Homer, Solomon’s temple was built 143 years and eight months before the Trojan war. It might be possible to make some such deductions but the impression left is that Homer explicitly confirms the building of the temple of Solomon. Or, in this case, the *Annals of Tyre* did.

Josephus wrote as an apologist for the Jewish scriptures, but really succeeds in showing the bible must be in error about the long friendship of Hiram with David and then with Solomon. If the long friendship with David is an exaggeration, then another “fact” in the bible is wrong. Incidentally, though Carthage was not founded until 813 BC in tradition, explaining Josephus’s claim, archaeology has found nothing there before about 740 BC.

Finally, Josephus, in *Contra Apion*, lists the kings of Tyre from Hiram in 969 BC to Pygmalion in 774 BC. He mentions another one Eloulaios, who reigned for another 36 years, but can be dated from Assyrian records to the period 736-701 BC. It leaves a gap of 38 years from 774 to 736 BC. Again the Assyrian records help, and Phoenician inscriptions in Cyprus too. Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BC) received tributes from successive kings of Tyre called Hiram and Mitinna. Hiram paid tribute in 743 BC, and must have been succeeded by Mitinna soon after, but the latter must have reigned only for a few years. Unless there are other unknown kings, this later Hiram must have reigned from 774 BC to about 741 BC, a period of 34 years. Josephus says the first Hiram, the friend of David and Solomon, reigned for 34 years. Hiram I ruled Cyprus and so too did Hiram II 200 years later. The contemporaries of Solomon and Jeroboam I fit better a period 200 years later in real history.

## **Was Solomon a God?**

The mythical purpose of “king” Solomon is to build and dedicate the temple to establish that Jerusalem had been associated with a temple founded by a great king called Solomon, not with a god called Solomon. The Solomonic temple to Yehouah did not really exist—the temple was to the god Solomon (Salem, Shalma)—but, having been destroyed by the Babylonians, the Persian administrators could pretend it had always been to Yehouah. No one in Yehud was in a position to deny it because it happened about a hundred years before. So, the second temple set up by the “returners” is not the second temple to Yehouah—it is the second temple all right, but the first to Yehouah or, at least exclusively to Yehouah.

In the bible Solomon has the powers of a Mesopotamian king—he is a melchizedek, in charge of the priesthood and the cult. He conducts the consecration of the temple as High Priest and blesses the *qahal*—the cultic community or congregation. But Solomon cannot escape the inevitability of the agreed formula that God does not like kings and even he is made to succumb to the temptations of apostasy and is punished as the Deuteronomic Historian makes clear (1 Kg 11).

The procedure for building the temple—decision of the king, confirmation by god, securing materials and labour, planning the building, inauguration and the king's prayer, all followed in 1 Kings 5-8—is that commonly attested in Mesopotamia from Gudea of Lagash on. Because it was common practice, it says nothing about this particular temple.

So, the temple to Solomon *did* exist, but it was a Pagan temple to a Pagan god! El-Amarna letters 74 and 290 mention “Bit-NIN.IB”, at first sight a reference to Assyria (House of Nineveh), but Professor Jules Lewy, an Assyriologist, said it was better read as Bit Shulman—the House of Solomon! The king of Damascus had commanded his chiefs, in letter 74, to attack the king of Jerusalem, ordering them to “assemble in Bit Shulman”. It must be near Jerusalem, or even in it if the plot was an assassination not a field attack.

In letter 290, the king of Jerusalem complained to the Pharaoh that the Apiru were invading the land, adding:

...and now, in addition, the capital of the country of Jerusalem—its name is Bit Shulman—the king's city, has broken away...

Towns in the ancient near east were often called after the ruling god (or vice versa). Lewy concluded that Jerusalem was also known at that time by the name “Temple of Shulman”—“bit” (“beth” in Hebrew) in this context meaning temple. The text is ambiguous, but Jerusalem here seems not to refer to a city but to a country. The capital city or the king's city was called Bit Shulman, after the temple of Shulman in it, yet after the conquest by the Israelites under Joshua, no mention is made of it. It was called Jebus or Salem before David conquered the Jebusites and made it his capital city.

Now “salem” is taken to mean “peace” but in view of this information, it looks to be a corruption of Shulman. The biblical story of Solomon begins to look like a rationalization of the traditional name of a city named after Shulman, a god found in Mesopotamian sources as Shelmi, Shulmanu or Salamu. The last of these spellings is “salem!” In the Hebrew Bible, “Solomon” has no terminal “n”, the “n” being added in the Greek *Septuagint*.

Indeed, it is interesting that the Greek Solomon, Salmoneus is the father of Tyro, the founding goddess of Tyre, the Phoenician city—the Phoenicians were Canaanites. More pertinent is that an important Phoenician god was Salim (Salem), the god of the evening, the evening star symbolized by Venus, and the setting sun, representing peace, whence “shalom”. Jerusalem, Absalom and Solomon share this root which appears all over the near east, and is still a popular Moslem name.

Was this a reference to Solomon's temple even at such an early date? The Egyptian glyphs read as “Shulman” have no sign of divinity, implying the name is not that of a god. If it is named after its founder then Bit Shulman means Palace of Solomon, and Solomon lived much earlier than anyone thought, or Egyptian chronology is



hundreds of years out. Or, perhaps the Egyptians did not recognize Shulman as a god. Either way, the Solomon legend was written to explain the memory of the old name of the city—Salem or Bit Shulman.

## More Aspects of the Myth

There is a tradition related by Josephus, in *Against Apion*, quoting Diodorus Polyhistor, author of a history of Phoenicia and also Menander of Ephesus. Both authors speak of Abibalus (Abibaal) and his son Hiram (Hiram) who built a causeway to the temple of Olympian Zeus because it was on an offshore island. Menander says he dedicated shrines to Herakles and Astarte. Solomon is not mentioned, but André Lemaire, as bent a scholar as you find, assures us that later traditions and inscriptions which confirm that Phœnicia, mainly Tyre, was a power in the Red Sea “during the first millennium BC” is evidence of the reality of the Solomon myth. Unbiased people would conclude the opposite. If the Phœnicians were a power then Solomon was not. The stories in Josephus belong to the eighth century BC not the tenth.

The Negev sites, previously thought to represent part of a network of royal fortifications, have been reinterpreted by Finkelstein and Perevolotsky (1980) as resulting from nomads settling down into a sedentary mode of life during a period of economic prosperity.

The interpretation of Shishaq's campaign, central to the tenth century dating of destruction layers, has also been challenged by Thompson (1992), Davies (1992), and Gelinas (1995). Barkay (1992) from his survey of the archaeology of Iron II concludes:

The precise dating of the settlement strata and find assemblages of the tenth and ninth centuries is fraught with difficulties... The attribution of destruction levels to the end of the tenth century at many sites is mere conjecture.

No sites have been proved to have been destroyed by Shishaq in 925 BC. Sheshonq I (Shishak?), according to the interpretation of his Karnak monuments which have the names of many northern cities, invaded Israel. This is confirmed by the fragment of a victory stele found at Megiddo. It is less clear that the Karnak inscriptions list Judahite cities, but only the attack on Judah appears in the bible.

The dating and interpretation of the so-called Solomonic gates has become the most spectacular area of disagreement between archaeologists over the identification and understanding of tenth century remains. Several substantial gateways of a similar design at Megiddo, Hazor, and Gezer were glibly assigned to Solomon. Barkay in 1992 highlighted the differences in the construction of the gates, the inconsistencies in the size, construction, and the type of wall to which they are bonded, and denies they were “built according to a single blueprint designed by a central authority”. He is forced to conclude that the “glorified picture” emerging from the biblical traditions does not correspond to “the reality reflected in the archaeological findings”.

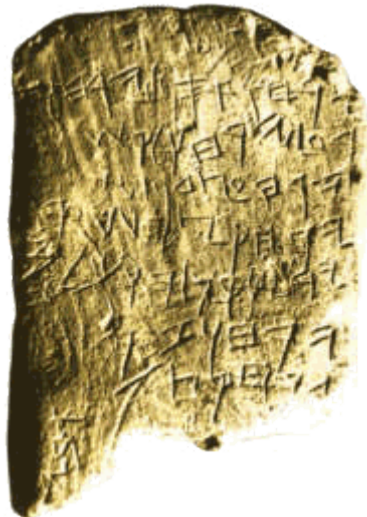
Hopkins (1997) has remarked that many archaeologists now contest the dating and the purported constructional unity of the four-entry gateways at Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. They do not, in his opinion, exhibit the uniformity implied by centralized planning and bureaucracy.

For the Solomonic period, there is precious little indication of regional integration in the archaeological

record.

Solomon's stables were discovered at Megiddo, and are still described as such by religious liars, but they are not stables, most modern archaeologists think. They are also not Solomon's if he lived in the tenth century because they are 200 years later. No one has ever found Solomon's port at Ezion-Geber. It is not at Eilat or at Aqaba or anywhere between, so Biblicists have been obliged to reposition it down the coast into Sinai, but no one knows where. Solomon's pillars or Solomon's mines north of Eilat were not Solomon's because they were abandoned before the tenth century and were probably Egyptian.

The kingdom of Sheba did not exist in the tenth century, and Ophir remains an unidentified place. It is only speculation that Tarshish is Tartessos in Spain (according to some) or Tarsus in Cilicia (according to others), neither being accessible entirely by sea from Solomon's supposed port in the tenth century except by circumnavigation of Africa. Darius II built a canal at Suez in the fifth century BC—only then was a direct sail from Eilat to Tarsus possible. Both Ophir and Tarshish might be entirely mythical places like Shangri-La, intended to depict the kingdom of Solomon as of equal civilisation and wealth—and equally mythical!



**Gezer Calendar**

André Lemaire cites Assyrian texts from the eighth and seventh centuries BC which mention a Sheba in Arabia, and some other Arabian queens, as confirming Solomon, two or three centuries earlier. It suggests that events of the seventh and eighth centuries have been retrojected to an earlier time. An academic at Tel Aviv University, Nadar Naaman, admits the tenth century kings have been “modelled on” eighth century kings. He paints it as an “innocent filling in of the details” but it is more than that. There is no framework of the supposed older characters, Hiram, Solomon, Jeroboam, to fill in, so what is happening is that the eighth century monarchs were retroscripted into the tenth century. The Solomonic and Davidic ages are simply the eighth century set 200 years earlier, with mythical elaborations.

Lemaire continues that almost nothing in the way of tablets or inscriptions have been found from the glorious time of David and Solomon. The best example is a small limestone tablet called the Gezer calendar. Yet Lemaire concludes Solomon's time was “probably an important period of literary creation”. “Probably” and “maybe” are favourite words of this supposed scholar who invariably concludes the opposite of whatever the evidence suggests. With no evidence in the least of a literary tradition in tenth century BC Palestine, Lemaire can write:

There were schools in Jerusalem and in the capitals of the administrative districts!

Solomon, ruling the empire built by his father, married the Pharaoh of Egypt's daughter, and the Pharaoh—deduced from biblical dating, probably wrongly, to have been Siamun—gave him the town of Gezer as a dowry. Pharaoh had just conquered Gezer and flattened it, so it did not seem much of a gift. Moreover, it is only about 20 miles west of Jerusalem, so should already have been part of David and Solomon's "empire". Pharaoh must have captured it from Solomon so that he could give him it as a dowry for his daughter! Furthermore, it is more likely that Solomon was Siamun than that Solomon married one of his daughters. The Egyptians only reluctantly married off royal princesses to foreigners, whereas the Pharaonic line was itself passed on matrilineally.

The wealth of Solomon must also be part of his legendary growth because he was at some stage supposedly unable to pay his debts to Hiram, king of Phoenicia (*1 Kg* 9:10-14). The idea of Jerusalem as capital is undermined by the observation of Hopkins in 1997:

There is a fundamental contradiction in portraying vast wealth gained through control of transit trade as Solomon takes advantage of an interlude in which the traditional coercive forces of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia are quiescent.

He asks, "What was the cumulative value of trade?" The archaeological record of Palestine's tenth century is severely impoverished in imported items that would be expected of a rich trading nation. Hopkins notes it is difficult to see how Jerusalem of the tenth century could have been the centre of a bureaucratic centralized state or empire when it was "barely the center of its contiguous domain". Even when he argues for the existence of Judahite and Israelite states with a degree of homogenous material culture, he notes that these replicated the city-states of the Bronze Age to a far greater extent than they anticipated the European nation states. The nationalist ideology of the biblical literature projects a unity that simply did not exist economically or sociologically.

Jeroboam is supposed to have rebelled and taken the ten northern tribes out of the confederation of tribes to form Israel leaving Judah and Benjamin to form Judah. Since he followed an oracle of God in doing this, he was again expressing the Persian propagandist's view that God had no desire for His people to have kings and he would undermine them if they insisted on it.

The most likely historical basis of the twelve tribes, if there is one at all, is that they were divisions of the province for taxation purposes. A system like this was attributed to Israel under Solomon (*1 Kg* 4:7-19;5:2-4,7). Each of the twelve divisions had to provide tribute for one month of the year. This was an Egyptian system used by the Pharaoh Shoshenq, a successor to Siamun and contemporary of the mythical Solomon.

All these traditions were set down at a relatively late period, often more than 500 years after the events to which they refer...

J Alberto Soggin

Much in the stories of David and Solomon was probably added by the scribes of the Maccabees who wanted to justify their setting up of a Jewish free state. They depicted their own battles with the Seleucid Greeks allegorized

as Philistines and Canaanites.



**This carved pomegranate is the only surviving relic from the First Temple in Jerusalem. That makes it one of the most important artefacts in Israel's history Except it's a fake**

What evidence is there for the Temple of Solomon? Those indoctrinated into biblical mythology as history might be surprised to know that the only evidence is the bible. There are no other documentary records or archaeological evidence of it at all. Nor are there any documentary records of a king Solomon or any archaeological sites that can be attributed to a King Solomon, though some once were. Only biblicists stick to the former erroneous associations of certain buildings and gates with king Solomon. There is no unequivocal archaeological evidence of King Solomon at all. Only one other inscription from the first temple period has ever been found, and that is thought by discerning scholars to be a forgery. It is the "bytdwd" victory stele which some think mentions the House of David (*bytdwd*). If it is actually genuine, it is the only inscription found in Palestine that mentions David.

In 2001, after a secret meeting of Israeli archaeologists had viewed and pronounced as genuine a stone stele from 1,000 BC, it was offered to the Israel Museum allegedly for \$10 million. The stele was so valuable because it seemed to refer to repairs to the temple of Solomon, the very first time that any contemporary text had ever been found that mentioned the temple of Solomon at all! That is why the Solomon stone would have been so important, and finding it was so sensational.

The museum authorities were suspicious of the artefact. Under Israeli law, any ancient artefact discovered after 1978 belongs to the state. So the private sale of a recently discovered stele was illegal. If it was a forgery, then selling it as the genuine article was fraud.

It was traced to a Jerusalem antiquities collector called Oded Golan, the man who "coincidentally" owned the James Ossuary, a limestone box used for keeping the bones of the dead, apparently naming James the brother of Jesus. Its Aramaic inscription read, "James, Son

of Joseph, Brother of Jesus". A police raid found both of these amazing relics in Golan's luxury apartment in Jerusalem, along with many other lesser but still remarkable relics, and a workshop!

Some ancient Hebraists called the Solomon stone a fake, based on its Hebrew which they thought was not ancient. Others said they could not say, in so doing frankly admitting so little is known of ancient Hebrew that definite pronouncements were impossible.

Dr Yuval Goren, a geo-archaeologist and head of the Archaeological Institute at Tel Aviv University, declared it a sophisticated forgery, as was the James Ossuary too. The stone had been taken from a Crusader castle and used for the inscription, then this had been aged and faked so well that scholars must have been among those that had done it.

An error the forgers made was that the tablet was not of basalt, the stone often used for ancient monumental inscriptions, but of stone that is not native to Israel, and that could not have been found in Judah in the reign of King Jehoash, its supposed author. The stone used is found on Cyprus, and was used as ballast in ships during the crusades, then found an additional use in the building of the castles, where it can still be found. A source was to be found in a ruined crusader castle only ten miles from Tel Aviv. Another error was in using chalk to fake the patina, thus leaving minute fossils on the stone that could not have been there had it been a genuine relic from the region.

Oded Golan was arrested. His workshop was full of tools, materials, and relics still being made showing that for years a relics forging scam was being run from there. The whole archaeological record has been contaminated by the forgers. Dr Goren has shown that many of the world's Jewish artefacts—particularly bullae, clay seals that were particularly easy to forge—held in prestigious museums and bought over the last two decades are fakes. Museums and collectors around the world have paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for relics forged in Oded Golan's scam. The more honest biblical archaeologists think everything without known provenance that came to Palestinian antiquities market in the last 20 years is likely to be forged, and so cannot be assumed to be genuine. The clever forgers have played on the desire of biblicists and believers to have their beliefs confirmed. They have proved their gullibility, and cast doubt on all supposed evidence for the bible.

## **Who Wrote It?**

William Dever, trying in 1997 to construct a case for a centralized state in the tenth century BC, argued that a system of writing was essential for "the functioning of the requisite urban bureaucracy" necessary for maintaining control over an increasingly diversified and resistant society. He acknowledged that the archaeological data was limited, but the size of Jerusalem for this period also militates against an extensive bureaucracy. The Amarna texts show how minimal military organization was, and of a different order to that needed for the organization of a centralized state.

One puzzling element in the claims for a centralized state is the lack of comparison with the MBII period. Dever, rejecting the notion that the state presumes the prior existence of urbanism, says that Palestine in the Early and Middle Bronze Ages was highly urbanized, yet no one supposes that a true state had yet come into existence,

only the characteristic pattern of Southern Levantine city-states. Yet many elements supposed to be of centralization and statehood in the Iron II period such as increasing urbanism and development of fortifications and gate structures are all present in the MBII period. Nothing clearly differentiates the two periods except the appeal to the bible.

Such towns, even if containing up to 2000 inhabitants, were primarily agricultural with most of the population involved in food production or the refining of agricultural products. Few were engaged in the production of artifacts, including pottery, and even fewer handled the production of luxury goods. As Lemche says:

The townships were mostly agricultural strongholds which probably housed the population which tilled the fields around the town themselves.

Towns were primarily a place of residence and acted as protective fortresses in periods of unsafety. Jerusalem had barely emerged from the countryside at this period, and the chances of it having a literacy able to run an empire seems incredible.

According to V Harris (*Ancient Literacy*) widespread literacy does not happen by accident but requires central commitment and investment, usually by government, and the setting up of a complex social network of support. Such a social structure would be needed to allow any substantial and accurate reporting of history such as emerged even in Greece only in the fifth century BC, with Herodotus and Thucydides, yet the Israelite so-called Court Historian of *Kings* supposedly lived in 1000 BC in a society that has left no visible trace! It shows it is fiction—a romance written much later, and not by the natives.

F W Golka in *The Leopard's Spots*, dismisses the idea of “schools” in Israel during the United Monarchy as a “consensus of scholarship” with no foundation, even biblical! The first mention of schools is in *Sirach* (*Wisdom* 51:23) written in the second century BC, 800 years after David. If there were no schools there were no sages who would have been their teachers.

The school story began with August Klostermann in 1908. The “scholars” trying to show schools existed in Israel would seek analogies in the great empires of Egypt and Babylonia, cite *Sirach* and the Rabbis of a later period, then come to Klostermann to fill in the gaps.

Klostermann only had three citations and he used them in ways that modern scholars would decry, yet they still cite him, because, says Golka, they have not read the original. One of Klostermann's examples (*Prov* 22:17-21) is now known to be a translation from passages in the Egyptian hieratic papyrus, *Amen-em-ope*. This was obtained by the British Museum in 1888 but not published until 1923. German scholars in studies from 1924-1926 showed that *Wisdom* 22:17-23:11 was in *Amen-em-ope*. The Egyptian provenance of these verses cut away Klostermann's idea that it was an exercise of a school teacher in Ancient Israel.

*Isaiah* 28:9-13 pertains indirectly to teaching, but fits a parent teaching a young child better than a school situation. Klostermann thought that *Isaiah* 50:4-9 was to do with discipleship and therefore with a master and his students. It seems to be mistranslated and actually refers to a “practised tongue”.

The biblical story of David's court was that he had an advanced civil service. Indeed by coincidence, he had



seven chief officers, just as the Persian king had seven advisors, although the priests were doubled up:

David executed judgment and justice unto all his people. And Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the host; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder; And Zadok the son of Ahitub, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, were the priests; and Seraiah was the scribe; And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over both the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were chief rulers.

*2 Sam 8:15; 1 Chr 18:14-17*

Now Joab was over all the host of Israel: and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and over the Pelethites: And Adoram was over the tribute: and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder: And Sheva was scribe: and Zadok and Abiathar were the priests: And Ira also the Jairite was a chief ruler about David.

*2 Sam 20:23*

Solomon expands the officers to 11, including an office of King's Friend, but has no place for a top teacher. Lemaire, who makes a cause of bad causes, tries to prove schools existed from isolated ostraca he thought were student's exercises, but he has to admit that the findings were poor and fragmentary. They are! All are isolated suggesting that they are individual, probably family examples of tuition and not schools where sets of exercises might be expected to be found together. No such tranches of ostraca have been found.

The "scholars" assume that Israel in the United Monarchy will have had institutions comparable with Egypt. Egypt had schools from the time of the Middle Kingdom, before the Hyksos kings—still believed or hoped by "scholars" to have been Israelites—so Israel must have had schools. Golka points out that if they had schools then they were Egyptian! Evidence for them is still lacking.

Besides comparing contemporary institutions in different countries, another approach is to compare countries at the same stage of development. Israel would be compared with the Egyptian Old Kingdom. There were no schools. The educational system was based on an apprentice system whereby a civil servant or a craftsman took on an apprentice as an adopted son. This is why "sons" were disciples of a master. It was a system that continued to the time of Christ, although, by then, the Greeks had already introduced schools after Alexander's conquests. The Israelite boy was normally trained by his father, and took his father's profession, but might be apprenticed to someone else. Jesus might have been the "son" of the carpenter because he was his apprentice, and not his natural son. The Persians had the same system. The magi inherited their position, just as the Israelite priests did.

The fault of all apologists, puzzled by a fictional history that is far from glorious, containing many incidents derogating the people and their kings, is that they take the history to be the work of the Jews themselves, and expect it to be laudatory. People, especially in those days, did not present critical histories of themselves. Jews and Christians have to realize, though, that stories written by a conqueror about a subject people need not be laudatory. They were written as propaganda to shame the people of Canaan into behaving the way the Persians wanted. The history therefore showed the immense potential the people had if only they would behave in the right way!

They had been introduced to the universal God of Heaven in a uniquely privileged way in the distant past but

their subsequent history showed them as consistently apostatizing against this great god. The god reacted by having to punish them repeatedly, culminating in having them deported to distant parts of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. But the great and generous god was giving them another chance through the action of his earthly agent, the Persian king, who was returning deported people to their rightful homes and restoring the proper worship of their gods. They were god's saviours of people and restorers of gods.

The native people naturally began totally unfamiliar with this new notion of a god and will have thoroughly opposed it. So, they were shown as unrepentent sinners, opposed not to the Persians but to the God of Heaven, who would punish them accordingly. Among the remnants of history and the romances, the "returners" told a story of the pure religion revealed by God as being corrupted by contact with the Canaanite religions. Stories like those of David and Solomon, and the adulterated history of the divided monarchy, were meant to hammer home the message of potential greatness constantly rejected through ungodly behaviour. Even their greatest kings finished up apostates. Many lesser ones were thoroughly wicked.

J Hughes (*Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology*) says that the stories of *Judges* and *Samuel* are fiction written to give a 1000 year background to the Jewish province set up by the Persians. David is depicted as having a policy of leaving the local administration in place when he conquered—Jerusalem, for example. This was what Cyrus the Persian did too, suggesting that David was modelled on the great Persian king.

Historians know that genealogies are often unreliable because those who commission them are more interested in claims in the present rather than any past actuality. In short, they are often produced to justify the present. That is just as true of Egyptian genealogies as it is for the genealogies given in the gospels. Actual blood relationships in the past are subordinated to present needs, to prove a legitimate claim for example. It is no less remarkable that native Canaanite chroniclers suddenly developed a preference for accurate genealogies than it is that they inexplicably evolved an ethical religion. Both were imposed from outside.

In the history of the monarchies, good and apostate kings alternate, a device meant to show that previous generations had repeatedly come back from error and apostasy to the true God, so that this generation could feel good about returning to the fold as others did before them. They were the remnant, the few Israelites who remained true and pure while others stayed with their idols. The supporters of the new religion and those who repented their apostasy were justified against those who refused to abandon their age old gods and goddesses. In these stories the king is also divine, though commentators will rarely observe upon it. The only proper king was the Shahanshah, a manifestation of God on earth. In *Psalms* 45:7, the king is addressed as God! In *1 Kings* 21:11-14, those who blaspheme "God and the king" are put to death. In *2 Samuel* 23:17, Elyon the Canaanite high god elevated the king (David) above men. The king has the attributes of a fertility god in *Psalms* 72:6-7, 16. He is a priest-king, Melchizedek, in charge of the cult as well as the country!

Plainly in the Hellenistic period, and notably in the Maccabaeon period, these stories were being reworked again to render the Jews and their kings much better people than they were shown as by the Persian administrators. David and Solomon in *Chronicles* seem much more saintly than in *Samuel* and *Kings*.

Scholars assume that the Wisdom literature came from the supposed schools of scribes, sages and wise men in the Israelite kingdom. Yet, the Wisdom literature is universal not peculiar to a small ancient kingdom in the

near east. Golka speaks of “the complete operational blindness of Old Testament scholarship”.

## Where was the Second Temple?

Temples in the Near East were of a standard pattern—a womb. They were a long narrow building often oriented toward the sunrise with a fairly narrow door protected by two pillars forming an entrance portico. Canaanitish religion was supposed to have been based on fertility rites and the temple orientation is reminiscent of the tombs in Ireland such as Newgrange and Shanballyemond that catch the rays of the sun at sunrise at significant times of the year. The tomb or temple was an earthly vagina for the fertilizing rays of the sun as they penetrate the darkness. The sun was then seen as fertilizing the earth. For a tomb the hope was for a rebirth, but in fertility cults it was originally to stimulate the land to fruition. Only later did it begin to signify a personal rebirth for individuals.

The whole place was holy, but within was a particularly holy place—the inner sanctum. The general orientation of these buildings show that they were pointing east to catch the morning sun and particularly often the midsummer or equinoctial sun. The Persians were familiar with the idea although their temples were in open places. They always prayed toward the morning sun, had to do all their worship before noon, and Persian soldiers oriented their tents to the rising sun, just as the temples are.

The Canaanite temple of Baal-Hadad in the Lower City of Hazor (c 1500-1200 BC) had the same plan as the Jewish temple except that the latter was oriented east-west and the temple of Hadad was north-south. The Hazor temple consisted of a porch, a main hall and a Holy of Holies in a line, with the Holy of Holies to the north. The Porch was the labia of the vagina up to the hymen or Veil, the Hall was the vagina itself, and the inner sanctum, or Holy of Holies, was the uterus.

The anteroom is called “Ulam”, the ritual hall “Hekhal” and the holiest part “Dvir”. The latter, which relates to “divine” looks to be related also to the name David which means “Loved”. The two other names comes from the Sumerian, Ulammu and E-gal. The *Gospel of Philip* calls the Dvir, the Holy of the Holies, the bridal chamber, entered only by the high priest. It was a room of thirteen by nine meters with a deep niche in its northern wall for the cult figure.

The Persians represented the temple as a microcosm of the world, combining heaven and earth. The shrine of the deity is the highest heaven, and the doors, the doors of heaven, with various levels between.

The two basalt pillars in the porch had no structural purpose. Solomon’s temple had the pillars “Jachin” and “Boaz”. Everyone pretends they have no idea what these pillars stand for, but, since they originated in fertility religions, they could be nothing other than phallic. The bible tells us repeatedly that the apostatizing Israelites erected pillars and standing stones for the fertility god and his consort. “Jachin” means “He erects” and “Boaz” supposedly means “strength” but punningly implies “shame”, so seems to allude to a phallus. In the accompanying picture of the temple at Tell Ta’inat, the remaining pillar base has two supporting lions taking the place of the testicles.

Most of the buildings and surface features on the Temple Mount are Islamic—no sign of the First or Second Temples can be found on it today. The temple was thoroughly razed and leveled to the ground on the 9th day

of Ab in 70 AD. After the Bar Kosiba revolt in 132 AD, the Romans razed the entire city of Jerusalem and a built a Roman city, Aelia Capitolina, on the ruins. With the reconstructions of the Roman, Moslem and Crusader ages, no one now knows where the temple was.

The Romans thought that Judaism could be destroyed as a force of nuisance in the empire by destroying its temple and the sacerdotal rites it practiced. Titus tried it in 70 AD but the ruins of the temple remained and, in the second century, Rabbi Akiba and his wife saw a fox leave the ruins of the Holy of Holies. Jews had not been barred from Jerusalem and hoped to renew the work on the temple. The revolt of Bar Kosiba scotched that and Hadrian decided on drastic measures. He closed off the Jewish temple ruins, including the Temple Mount and the Antonia fortress, by erecting a wall to the South, West and North. He put an immense platform over the temple so that it was utterly hidden and its position could not be found. On the platform, he built the Temple of Jupiter.

Hadrian changed the name of the city to Aelia Capitolina and prohibited Jews from the city, so that it was purely gentile. With these measures and the earlier butchery of many Jews across the empire, Hadrian succeeded in eliminating Jewish subversion. Jews were stopped from entering the city until the seventh century, and the Byzantines and Arabs continued to call the city "Aelia".

The destruction of the Second Temple by Titus, the massive building program by Hadrian and the cutting off of Jews from the city of Jerusalem led to an error in the identification of the site of the temple.

A similar temple, also to Jupiter, commissioned by Hadrian, built by the same builder, completed in the reign of Antoninus, is at Baalbek in Lebanon. Like the works on the Temple Mount, it is built over an earlier temple—famous for the Prophecies of Micah! Micah is Michael or Mithras. Baalbek's Roman name was Heliopolis or On. The site is immense and the stones cyclopean, so the local tradition is that it was built by jinns at the command of Solomon! The source of the designs on the doorways and the ceiling and in the capitals of the columns at Baalbek are Roman. Figures of Jupiter Heliopolitanus standing between two bullocks or calves have been found dating from Roman times. The wall of the temple area is built of great stone blocks like those of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, but bigger.

The Wailing Wall is *not* what remains of the outer wall of Solomon's temple, but is part of Hadrian's Roman reconstruction. The stones are decorated by quading—a cut is made round the four sides effectively framing the face of the stone, but not below ground level in the footings (a waste of effort)—typical of Roman practice found also at Baalbek. Such stones are far superior in workmanship to anything that has ever been found from the supposed time of Solomon.



The Dome of the Rock showing its polygonal shape

Roman architectural fashion of the time was for a rectangular basilica, and a polygonal centrepiece opposite a courtyard. The Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock exactly have this plan. It seems the Roman Temple to Jupiter on this site may have been converted for Christian purposes in the fourth Century, and the foundations of the ruined churches then reused for the Moslem structures, the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, built in the seventh century.

Jews wail at a Pagan Roman wall, and know it! What then does their jealous God think? Christian tourists look on in wonder, but they are ignorant, not even realising that the large stones *are* Roman. Moslems are as ignorant as the Christians—the Jews maintain the charade for their benefit!

In the third century AD, the Jews of Babylon could not identify the site of the holy temple. In Jerome's fourth century commentary on *Isaiah*, an equestrian statue of Hadrian was exactly over the the Holy of Holies. The Holy of the Holies must have been where the present El Kas fountain now is. According to most authorities, the mounted figure was in the centre of the square before the temple. The Byzantine Christians destroyed the Pagan temple but left the statue of Hadrian on his horse.

The Arabs conquered Palestine, realized the platform was the Temple Mount, cleared the site, discovered the remains of the Roman temple and thought it was Solomon's Temple—holy to Moslems too. So, they built on it the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aksa. Since then everyone has assumed that the walls of the ancient buildings remaining were the ruins of the Jewish Temple when they were really Roman. Because the Roman walls were thought to have been Solomon's or at least Herod's, it is not surprising that the walls of Aelia Capitolina have never been found, though they were more recent and ought to have been more substantial than the Jewish remains. Nor have the buildings been found of the Tenth Roman Legion (symbolized by a boar), which was stationed and served in Jerusalem for 200 years, and quite possibly was the origin of the gospel legend of the Gadarene Swine.

### **Tubia Sagib's Proposal**

Tubia Sagib, a Tel Aviv architect, has proposed a southern location for the holy places of the temple. The Dome site may have been originally a Canaanite High Place with tombs beneath, and the location of an Asherah pillar. The level of the Herodian temple court in this more southerly location would have been 16 meters lower than the level of the Temple Mount courts that we see today. "Living water", fresh, flowing water, not water from a cistern, was required for the ritual bath (mikveh) used by the temple priests, just as it was for the Zoroastrian

ritual purification from which it came. There is no way to bring the water from the aqueduct to the ritual bath by gravity as is required by religious law unless the temple was south of its presumed position.

Josephus writes that the second temple was called “the Sanctuary, and was ascended to by fourteen steps from the first court. The “Sanctuary” was “Paradise”, the kingdom of God—heaven!

Antonia’s fortress and the Temple Mount were connected. There were steps which one could descend, from the fortress to the arcades of the Temple Mount. The Dome of the Rock in Tubia’s view was the site of Antonia’s Fortress. It was in the Northwestern corner of the Temple Mount. The purpose of the fortress was to protect the Temple Mount from the North, the least protected side of the city. During the time of Nehemiah it was Hananel’s Tower, also called Birah. The fortress was rebuilt by the Hasmoneans who called it Baris. Herod the Great enlarged and reinforced it, renaming it after Mark Antony.



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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 1. The Crisis of Sacred History**  
**Modernist School**

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I think that the minimalists... are good scholars, and they are important scholars, and they have contributed a lot to historical and Biblical scholarship. We have to listen to them carefully, even when they are wrong. Sometimes they are right. It depends on what, it depends on where; but they have steered this debate—which is a positive debate, an important one. Whatever the verdict is, the debate is important, and the debate is there, thanks to their publications. So we have to be very grateful for their publications. This has nothing to do with whether I agree or disagree with them, but I respect them and I respect their scholarship in the same way that I respect good scholarship from the conservative side...

**Tel Aviv Archaeologist, I Finkelstein, Interview in BAR**

### **The Minimalists**

To judge from the ranting heard in from the religious right, the wrong-headed critics of the Jewish scriptures “can be safely ignored” but are simultaneously “a danger to western civilization”. God’s big liars do not have to be coherent. So, who are these subversive scholars endangering our lives?

They are the biblical minimalists, called the “gang of four” by their detractors: T L Thompson, N P Lemche, P Davies and K W Whitelam. Obviously, to be called a “gang of four” is part of the smear campaign, gangs of four being underhand plotters, however good their motives might have been among those who have had the name. There are many more than four minimalists, but these four are among the most prominent.

The disagreements began over a century ago with Wellhausen, but have sharpened in the last quarter of a century, and now are associated with many scholars, not all of whom can be called a minimalist, or agree on everything. John Van Seters, Gösta Ahlström, David Ussishkin, Ze’ev Herzog, Israel Finkelstein, Giovanni Garbini, Mario Liverani, Carlo Zaccagnini, and Pietro Fronzaroli and Axel Knauf in historical linguistics, Robert Carroll and David Gunn in literary readings, Rainer Albertz, Etienne Nodet, Graham Auld and Herbert Niehr in the history of religion and tradition-history, not to mention others from universities in various countries including Israel, Italy, Denmark, UK and the US have all contributed to the belated Enlightenment approach to the history of the Levant.

These scholars are not an isolated wing of malcontents—the discourse is international. They oppose the synthetic biblical archaeology of William Albright, Rabbi Nelson Glueck, Benjamin Mazar, Roland de Vaux, and even Kathleen Kenyon in favour of examining historical evidence independently of classical historiographies like Manetho, the bible and Josephus. They also reject the tradition-history of Martin Noth and the “salvation history” of Gerhard von Rad, the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule of Sigmund Mowinckel and Hermann Gunkel and even the source criticism of Julius Wellhausen and Otto Eissfeldt. Thompson says:

It is a generational shift, an ordinary process in scholarship.

In the Copenhagen school, Fred Cryer has worked primarily in linguistics and sociology and Tilde Binger, Allan Rosengren and Hans Jørgen Lundager Jensen in the history of religion. In archaeology, Margreet Steiner and Terje Oestigaard, in history Margit Sjeggstad, Diana Edelman and Flemming Nielsen, in biblical exegesis, the history of religion and intertestamental literature, Thomas Bolin, Ingrid Hjelm and Greg Doudna, all belong to the new generation of scholars. These must be the ones called “nihilists” by Hershel Shanks—editor of BAR, a biblical archaeology popular magazine—and William G Dever. The most productive academic side of this discussion has often been due to many of these scholars engaging in disagreement with each other more than with a supposed “mainstream” of scholarship.

Their detractors are the maximalists, biblicists who argue that the bible is an accurate guide to the history and culture of ancient Israel. Minimalists are those who argue that the bible is actually a record of what later generations mythologized about their history. Maximalists think the bible is mostly true history while the minimalists think it is hard to know what is true history in it, but biblicists are fond of calling anyone who criticises the bible at all as minimalists.

The maximalist side’s bulldog is Dever. He seems to feel personally threatened by the minimalist position, is shrill in his invective and sets up straw dolls to attack rather than debating the issues. He will present what he calls a “summary” of the minimalist position—even though he admits that minimalism is not a monolithic position—and tilts at this effigy.

The general public is unaware of all this. Many still think that the bible is much more historically accurate than even conservative scholars are usually willing to admit, and part of the reason is that the clergy keep quiet about it. The more people realize just how little of the bible is historical, the less basis for wrangling and murdering among Christian sects there will be.

## **Philip Davies**

Professor Philip Davies is one of the biblical minimalists—some say the leader. One of the world’s leading scholars of the ancient world, professor Davies has been carrying out textual analysis of the bible for over thirty years. Challenging biblical texts is still a controversial and even dangerous business when careers are taken into account, and Davies is no stranger to controversy. Biblical criticism brings vitriolic and censorious attacks from those who will accept nothing other than that the bible, being divine revelation, is beyond reproach.

In 1992, ignoring any political controversy that his book, *In Search of “Ancient Israel”*, might arouse, Davies argued that no archaeological or historical evidence supports the existence of the *Old Testament* kings David and his son Solomon, upon whose dynasties the ancient Israelite kingdom was based, with its capital in Jerusalem. The David and Solomon story is a literary text produced by biblical authors writing hundreds of years after the purported events, to be seen more as a work by Shakespeare than purely as a religious icon. Reprinted since, the book continues to attract attention on both sides of the Atlantic, with coverage in the leading American journal, *Science* and the *Times Higher Education Supplement*.

His refusal to conform to a dogmatic view of what can and cannot be published about the bible led to the formation of Sheffield Academic Press:

An academic press editor told us that the material we were producing was not marketable and we became angry and decided that scholars should be deciding what texts were appropriate, not editors. Our solution was to start a journal, which published articles by younger, unconventional scholars. Within a few years we had moved on to publishing books. What started off as an anti-establishment activity is now a large company with shareholders, but it is still about good manuscripts.

His published views which put together archaeology and the biblical account continue to raise eyebrows. SAP has now passed into new ownership. Davies supports the view that the *Old Testament* represents a narrow slice of the ancient world—maybe a few hundred years before Christ—rather than the 1500 years that biblical theologians consider it to be. However, he also feels that today's shocking view quickly becomes tomorrow's commonplace:

I feel the general consensus has shifted. I think this book will probably be regarded as terribly conservative in about 15 years. Its impact has been slow but it has filtered into mainstream debate and the controversy in the scholarly world has more or less died down.

Davies says the difference between minimalists and maximalists is less than it once seemed to be. Maximalists have abandoned much of the historicity of the bible they once held, through the evidence presented by minimalists over the last 30 years. The minimalist position is that the stories in the bible are largely mythical in nature. Although they take place in real places and may sometimes be loosely based on real people or events, the stories themselves serve a mythical rather than historical function. They are an attempt of later generations to lay claim to an identity, not an attempt at disinterested historical reporting. Curiously, the "biblical maximalists" accept that as being an accurate assessment of much of the bible up until the "United Monarchy" at the time of David and Solomon, when Israel and Judah were still part of one kingdom.

His deeper concern is that a focus on the bible as theological revelation, rather than as a literary text, leads scholars to search for some stories while ignoring others.

My concern is that the Bible is an unreliable field guide for archaeologists. They should stop trying to correlate what they dig up in excavations with biblical texts. So long as biblical scholarship remains theological, there will be no search for the history that no one thinks is missing. Instead, there will persist that great reluctance to look hard for "ancient Israel" in the life of Iron Age Palestine, for fear that it might not be there.

This awareness of what a specific bias may conceal is a wider trend in literary criticism and other academic disciplines.

Feminism has encouraged us to be aware of this in recent years, and it represents a major break from the dogma of the Bible. This is just one example—the texts cannot be taken too literally, they need to be questioned.

For reasons like this, Dever spends a lot of time attacking postmodernism without ever really establishing that biblical minimalism is a postmodernist position or that it relies upon postmodernism for its premises. The

Sheffield Academic Press publishes papers which take a postmodern stance, but also publishes many of orthodox scholarship. Sometimes the use of postmodernist language like textual “deconstruction” means little more than a fashionable way of saying textual “criticism” or textual “analysis”. So, Dever wastes a lot of time striking out at an easy but ultimately irrelevant target and fails to offer rebuttals of minimalist arguments. Although, in an attempt to save Israel and the United Monarchy, Dever offers evidence that a culturally distinct group was developing in the Palestinian hills by the tenth century BC, he does nothing to rebut the idea that the biblical stories are themselves later cultural products set earlier in time.

The whole subject is absurdly sensitive in the modern day. The study of history benefits enormously from divorcing the bible from it, and viewing the bible from the literary perspective that is more appropriate. Throughout Britain and the United States, the bible is mostly taught on the basis of theology. Theologically is however not the only way to teach it. The study of the bible is also a legitimate humanities discipline, examining its contemporary relevance and its academic validity.

## **George Athas**

George Athas of the University of Sydney is one of those strange people who think they can be biblical archaeologists and Christian, and remain honest! He tries to pretend, in a university lecture (ATHAS, George, *Minimalism: The Copenhagen School of Thought In Biblical Studies, Edited Transcript of Lecture*, 3rd Ed, University of Sydney, 1999) he was so proud of he published it on the web, that he is fair to critics of the biblicists (the minimalists), but predictably finishes up apologizing for the biblicists.

When this initial criticism of his piece was published here in 2000, Athas complained bitterly, unable to understand that God would allow someone to criticize such a devout evangelist. In several e-mails, he promised to set the whole of the University of Sydney, if not the Australian nation on to us, if we did not desist from criticizing him. So as not to ruffle his feathers unnecessarily, he seemed so upset, references to him were removed, leaving the piece seeming to attack an anonymous source. Two years on, Athas still has his tendentious paper on the web. He wants to be invisible to his critics and visible only to his admirers.

His lecture transcript begins with a decent review of the Copenhagen (modern) school of biblical investigation then continues with his critique of it. Here we summarize and criticize his critique.

## **The Copenhagen School**

The modern archaeology of ancient Israel has taught us many things. The historical Israel was just like any other nation or people in the Levant. Their houses, cities, products, gods, rites, temples and shrines were essentially the same. Despite our preconceptions from religious studies, the Israelites were no different from other Canaanites.

The bible shows how Moses led the Israelite tribes out of Egypt, they wandered 40 years in the deserts around Sinai, and then Joshua led them into the land of Canaan—the Promised Land. Modern archaeologists can find no evidence of any new group, the newly arrived Israelites. At the time (c 1220 BC), there appears to be hardly anyone living in Canaan at all. The people that do emerge seem no different from those there before. They are farmers who are natives of the land, not immigrant shepherds from Egypt as the bible says.

The modern school allows us to evaluate the bible more objectively. If the artefacts and the bible just do not match up, then the artefacts help us construct a history of ancient Israel from which we can judge the sufficiency of the bible.

The bible emerges as a work of literature not history, so archaeology and the bible will conflict. The bible is a religious narrative that does not have to be true history. If there is history in the bible, it is incidental. Discrepancies with history are to be expected in literary work. The bible was not meant to be history and so should not be scorned as history but appreciated as religious literature.

The biblical texts are all late, written centuries after the events they portray. Form criticism and textual criticism made scholars suspect that the biblical literature was addressed to a small group of people who, under the Persians, were deported and resettled in the land of Judah in the fifth century BC. Archaeology confirms that biblical texts were not written close to the events they describe. Archaeology also showed many biblical events had not happened in history!

If Moses had written the creation accounts as he is said to have done, Egyptian ideas of creation should prevail since Moses was from Egypt. The two *Genesis* creation accounts are similar to Babylonian creation accounts. *Genesis* also mentions the “Tower of Babel” and “Ur of the Chaldees”. Yet Moses, the supposed author, lived hundreds of years before and in Egypt, a thousand miles from Babylon and Chaldaeia. These accounts must reflect a time Babylon influenced Israel—after 587 BC and in the succeeding Persian period when both Babylon and Israel were under Persian rulership.

The content of the bible is most compatible with it being written in the Persian period, and afterwards. Today, few scholars argue for a pre-exilic dating of the Jewish scriptures. Scholars now argue for their late composition. The late dates reflect a time when the people of Judah were under Persian dominion, from the 5th century and later. Some passages date from the Hellenistic era, post-Alexander, after 333 BC.

## **Archaeology not Bible**

So, we should not use the bible to interpret archaeology because it is story—not a history. The artefacts, not the bible, should firstly inform us about the history of the people who lived in the Levant between 1250 BC onwards. Discrepancies can be attributed to the bible being documents specifically of the Persian era and later—not earlier! The biblical literature reflects a particular ideology. The creation accounts in *Genesis* are Babylonian creation myths rewritten to make the Jewish God, Yehouah, the god of creation. They promote the ideals of exclusive Yehouism. The God Yehouah ruled over all things.

The modern school uses anthropology, the study of human life and culture, to explain the artefacts, by considering how people adapt to their surroundings. The bible says the tribes of Israel became a fully fledged state under King David c 1000 BC. Letting the artefacts speak on their own, archaeologists could find no evidence for such a fully fledged state.

Archaeologists looking for an empire like David's, and particularly Solomon's, expect to find monumental public works like palaces, city walls, roads and inscriptions with written bills of exchange and legal entitlement amongst

the ruins. They are not found until the strata are hundreds of years later than the putative empire.

Nor did anthropological studies suggest evidence for any state in northern Israel until c 870 BC, and for a state in Judah until c 750 BC, quite contradicting the bible. In 1000 BC, the southern hill country of Israel, the region of Judah, was devoid of population—not more than three thousand people were there. In the northern hill country, people lived amongst ruins, in detached villages, in a subsistence economy. There are no archaeological or anthropological signs of any state at all.

Treating the bible as literature relieves a lot of the waste of effort of trying to confirm it as historically accurate. It provides answers for the discrepancies between the bible and archaeology. Biblicists had taken the bible to be the prime source, as the word of God, and increasingly were distorting history to force it into a biblical straitjacket. By ignoring the bible, other scientific disciplines like anthropology could usefully be deployed, as it would have been on any other modern archaeological investigation.

Our lecturer praises these ideas as keeping scholars alert, making them look carefully at their scholarship in biblical studies, making them reassess their methods and identify their assumptions and biases. In truth, biblicists are intentionally sloppy in their work, methods, argumentation and conclusions. For long they never expected any challenge and seemed to think that God expected them to make the bible into history or lose their immortal souls. They were therefore more likely to obscure some controversial finding that contradicted the bible than to reveal it.

## **The Failings of Archaeology**

Now, our exponent of biblical bias turns to criticisms of the modern school. He says it has many weaknesses, “but they are subtle,” and “not gapingly obvious,” meaning they are of little practical consequence but are a great relief to biblicists. He even has the nerve to say, “in Biblical Studies, nothing is sacred!” That after biblicists even in modern times have cheated like cardsharps to keep their false belief in the bible alive.

Our expert tries to find some hope by undermining his own discipline of archaeology, proving that Christians will still happily put their faith before their livelihood. The technique he uses is a common one of all apologists, to patronize his opponents hoping to give a non-committed reader the impression that critics are uneducated dunces. When the readers are not dunces, it exposes the apologists as fools themselves, but they expect that their readers will be Christians and will believe anything said by another Christian, especially those that claim some authority. It should not need to be said that many of the critics themselves are Christians, but they are Christians who do not think God needs defending by liars.

So, he tells us archaeology is not an exact science. Oh! You mean it is not like mathematics, or even engineering! Goodness! This witless man actually says:

We cannot dig up an ancient city, take it into a laboratory, put it in a beaker, perform an experiment on it and come up with the history of ancient Israel. The nature of what we are dealing with does not allow this.

Was this really a university lecture, or was it to a local Sunday School of five year olds? Are university students



in Australia so thick? Anyway, the job of archaeologists is to see if they can somehow piece together how the artefacts and the ruins got into the state that the archaeologists found them in. Historians reach conclusions by looking at the data the archaeologists find. Go on! You mean they are not digging up DVDs of Ben Hur and the Exodus! How disappointing.

Conquered cities are expected to show signs of the conquest, like burnt debris from fires, bones strewn here and there, some walls knocked down, and so on. One of the points that actually led many scholars to claim that there was no such thing as an Israelite Conquest of Canaan under Joshua, is that no evidence for it exists—no debris, no bones, no broken walls. He wants us to believe the modernists have not considered that a conquest can occur without such debris, and he tells us all about William the Conqueror in 1066 AD who left no traces of broken walls and so on. He ignores here other concomitant signs of conquest such as changes in material culture which certainly happened in England with the Norman conquest but did not happen in Israel with Joshua's.

He thinks modernists need to know that when destruction occurred in an ancient city, and no one was living there afterwards, there are other explanations besides conquest—earthquakes, plague or disease, or fire. It is biblicists who needed reminding of these simple matters because they have been in the habit of attributing all such broken cities in Palestine to the tribes of Israel, when any of Athas's other explanations would have been more true, not to mention defeats by other more likely candidates like the Egyptians and the Philistines.

## Dating

The lecturer then starts to warn us of other matters that his biblicist training makes him thoroughly familiar with. He says many things in archaeology are relative and depend on circular arguments, notably dating, which depends mainly on pottery. Of course, done properly there would be nothing circular about it, but as he admits, "scholars forget that these dates are relative to other things and often treat them as though the dates are absolute when they are not". Now, it is again biblicists like the notorious schools set up by William Foxwell Albright and his cliques that have made a habit of confusing the picture by doing what our authority pretends to be warning biblicist critics about. Either this man is a fool or he takes his audience to be fools.

Yet he speaks as if those of his ilk are reasonable people seeking honest truth when he says "quite often, new discoveries mean we have to reassess the dating of certain items, just like we did for Solomon's stables. New discoveries showed us that we had to redate the tripartite structure we thought was Solomon's stable to a century later". Quite so, but it was the absurd expectations of biblicists that misdated Solomon's stables in the first place, it is pressure from modernists that forces reviews of matters like this, and there are people still who prefer to keep them as Solomon's stables, usually Christian commentators, despite all the contrary evidence. "Quite often," says this lecturer, "there is an inertia in this process of re-evaluation." Remember, he is supposed to be telling of the weaknesses of the revisionists' case but keeps reverting to blatant examples of biblicist cheating. He expects his audience not to know the difference.

One of the most prominent archaeologists in Israel is Israel Finkelstein who is proposing redating all chronologies for tenth and ninth century BC Israel down by one century to the ninth and eighth centuries BC. If this redating were to solve any problems of Palestinian history at the expense of biblical tradition, it will be resisted tooth and nail by the biblicists.

Moving from banality to empty banality, all meant to be criticism of the biblicist critics, he now tells us, “Our picture from archaeology is incomplete.” Oh! We thought archaeologists were really digging for gold! You mean they still have things to discover? Well! Wha’d’ya know! “Our picture of ancient Israel is incomplete and therefore biased.” This is actually desperation. He is hoping that something will turn up. After over a hundred years of digging in Palestine, biblicist are now praying that God will give them a break. If they dig a bit further, they will find Solomon’s palace.

Our expert gets more honest when he says it is a lottery which archaeologist digs up which site. He wants us to think this is quite natural “bias” when it is the biblicist loonies seeing God in every shovelful, versus the modern archaeologists who see no more than they unearth.

In interpretation, there are the two main camps of those who will see nothing other than whatever the artefacts show, and those who will interpret them as broadly as they can to encompass their biblical prejudices. Archaeologists have dug in Jerusalem and found no evidence for a capital city of David. Most think this shows Jerusalem was uninhabited in the tenth century BC, but some think it means Jerusalem flourishing. The reader will guess which is which.

### **Evidence of Absence?**

Biblicists hate this, and so this one pleads the old apologetic stand-by—absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. There is no scientist who is not fully aware of this popular saying among the faithful. It is obviously true, but becomes perverse when the absence of evidence is profound—when many searches over one hundred years, in the places where evidence is expected, reveal... nothing!

He shows his desperation: “One day it could happen.” Certainly, tomorrow, the very evidence the biblicists have been seeking *could* turn up. That is their prayer. But scientists, unable to do determinative experiments, work on the basis of probabilities. The probability is very high, when a great deal of digging over many years in prime sites has revealed nothing, that there is nothing there. Since many, perhaps most, biblicist critics are Christians or Jews, they too would like to see genuine evidence for Solomon or the Conquest, but modernists are honest! They will not twist evidence to fit, and when it does not fit, they say so. Why will those who pretend that they are righteous, because they love God, not do the same? Because they have sinecures to defend, not God.

From correspondence in the Amarna Letters, 14th century BC Jerusalem was ruled by someone called Abdi-Hepa. Otherwise, there is not much other evidence for it, and, from the evidence, a historian might conclude that Jerusalem was only a village. He fatuously warns us that our conclusion—that Jerusalem was unimportant, presumably—does not mean Abdi-Hepa never existed. Quite what he is getting at is anybody’s guess.

The Egyptians had no reason we know of for inventing correspondence with fictitious cities, but our lecturer has no idea whether the “Jerusalem” of the Amarna letters is the Jerusalem of the bible. The quotation marks here show that the Amarna letters do not actually write “Jerusalem”, and in any case, the bible says Jerusalem was not called Jerusalem until David gave it that name in the tenth century. It had been called Salem. This is a typical case of a biblicist eating his sweetie and wanting another one as well—in other words double standards... OK, lying! It also throws up another example of biblicism—it will ignore the bible when it suits.

## Documentary Evidence

Instead of even noticing this (or perhaps he noticed all right but it was his intention to deceive), he pretends that the revisionists are opposed to documentary evidence in general, not just the bible. He tells us, “The only reason we know of Abdi-Hepa is because of the actual written documents. If it was not for some of the written documents that we have in our possession now, we would have incomplete and therefore distorted pictures of history and what actually happened.” He adds elsewhere, “Take away all written documents from history, and we just about obliterate 90% of history.” Documents have to be assessed just as pottery has. If there is no reason for thinking documents are tendentious, then they can freely be accepted. That applies to 90 percent of historical documents, but does not apply to the bible. It *does* apply to the Amarna letters!

Now he proves his total incompetence. He says that we would not have known that William conquered England in 1066 AD if we had not had written documents. It is a stupid surmise, but shows what a dunce he is—and he claims to be an expert lecturing university undergraduates, maybe even postgraduates. Well, they do say standards are falling. This is so stupid, it does not need refuting. The totality of evidence of a conquest in England is so great even without documents that it does not have to be recounted.

## Kernel or Nut?

The biblicists are “kernelists” (“nutters”, for short) because, as this man says, biblical literature must reflect some “kernel” of history. The kernel might as well have been a “straw” because that is what he is grasping at. The revisionists are not saying what he says they are, that the bible contains no history, they are saying no one knows what it is. He fails, from his elevated academic position, to notice that no one knows what bits of the bible are true, until they are confirmed externally. Revisionists are pointing out that those who have used the bible to condition their thoughts about Palestinian history, have made a pig’s ear of it. A better method is to ignore the bible and approach the external evidence without a biblical prejudice. That is what he and other Christians cannot do, and that is why they should be excluded from any valuable biblical site and restricted to pulpits.

He now tries to turn this on its head by claiming that the bible is often correct and is confirmed externally. “Archaeologists have found things that are mentioned in the bible.” This is true but he has to come into the later part of the biblical period—when great nations like the Assyrians were keeping reliable records—to find it. He cites the annals of Sennacherib, king of Assyria c 700 BC, just a hundred years before ancient Judah died, as mentioning the King of Judah, King Hezekiah, who was obliged to pay a large amount of tribute to escape with an intact city. An elaborated version of this appears in the bible. The bible shows Hezekiah being saved by God for his faith. God kills off a load of Assyrian soldiers with a nasty angel.

This shows a kernel of real history embedded in the bible, he tells us. It shows a kernel, sure enough, but without the external evidence of the Assyrian tablets who would know what the kernel was? Did Hezekiah pay a ransom to stop Sennacherib or did God send an angel to kill all his soldiers? Since the tribute had been paid and is mentioned in both sources, we can take it to be the historical reason. The part that is unhistoric is the part that shows God in action to save the king and his city. Our man will believe it, but it was unnecessary for God to kill 185,000 soldiers if Sennacherib had been satisfied by the payment. Ancient kings did not destroy rich cities out of malice but to punish the inhabitants and to remove a potential problem. They preferred rich

cities to pay tribute and become vassals. Hezekiah became a vassal of Sennacherib, but from the bible, we might have thought a murderous angel caused an ignominious retreat.

He relates the fact that there is a tunnel under Jerusalem to allow water to be brought in to the city. The bible and tradition ascribes it to Hezekiah, a king who is also confirmed by signature seals of some Kings of Judah. He does not seem to consider that the tunnel was well known when the bible was written later. That means that the story of Hezekiah could be a later tradition or could have been invented to explain the tunnel. An inscription in the tunnel may or may not be original. That too could have been inscribed in later times, perhaps the time of the Maccabees precisely to confirm the scriptures. Religious forgery is well established, though religious people do not speak about it. He admits that the stories about Hezekiah in the bible were probably written down 150 or 200 years after the events.

## Conclusion

Athas summarises with, “we have to constantly review our conclusions in light of new evidence.” Quite so! Why then are the biblicists so reluctant to do it? He seems to answer, “we just do not know what we will discover next. We could find something that turns all our old conclusions on their heads.” To which we say, “So what?” It is another commonplace sentiment, but meanwhile we have the evidence that we have and must base our opinions honestly on that. When something new turns up, we shall assess it in context and revise our conclusions. Only biblicists, who already have conclusions, can wait and pray for something to turn up to confirm them.

He harks back to his theme in more desperation. It is getting a bit weak, though! “The bible is reliable to some extent.” He also has to keep accusing critics of the biblicists as “biased”. It is biased to say that the United Monarchy is a myth, when we have found nothing to show it never existed. Honest! That is what he is trying to say! Listen!

How can we judge whether any incident for which we have not found anything never did happen? Just because we cannot corroborate it here and now does not mean it never happened.

The man's a Christian. He would say it is biased to say that demons do not exist when we have no evidence to show they do not! Or angels. Or fairies. Or Santa Claus. Or Mother Goose...

He concludes by saying that this revisionism “is just one model or framework with which to do history”, and “it is a biased model, just like any other model that scholars care to use.” After spending all of this repetitive lecture explaining the modern archaeological approach to biblical history, he suddenly tells us there are lots of other models. Well, if these alternative models are that good, why is no one using them, and why does our expert have to waste his students' time telling them about a model that is no better than lots of others.

The answer is that he is caught in a bind. He cannot deny the effectiveness of the modern approach but he does not like it because it proves that he and other biblicists like him are bigoted dolts. He reviews it apparently fairly then produces a parody of argumentation to refute what he has already praised. In so doing he uses the very abuses of the system that a previous generation of biblicists like himself have used to confuse biblical archaeology to uphold their biblical obsessions.

He says modernism claims to eliminate many of the biases of the old school of biblicist historians, but it just creates new ones, and scholars must judge what they will choose. It proves that he never had any idea about scientific methodology, or if he ever did, he has subsumed it to his Christian dogmatism. Either way, he is not a scientist and should not be let loose on any archaeological site or sample.

No model or method can claim to be completely objective and watertight at the same time.

No model can claim to be unequivocally either separately, but scientists should choose the best one going, not the one they prefer based on their whims. If natural scientists had done that we should still be discussing the merits of phlogiston. This man is doing what earlier and far more senior biblical archaeologists who hold to Judaism or Christianity have done. He is trying his best to keep the waters cloudy as other more principled people try to clear them.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 1. The Crisis of Sacred History**  
**Hebrew Goddesses & Origin of Judaism**

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### **Where, Oh Where Has the Mother God Gone?**

In pre-historic and primitive societies in which men and women are segregated into their own living quarters, and children live with the women, it is not surprising that women are seen as dominant and provide the image of the supreme being. To children, women were the source of sustenance and discipline. Men were mainly out of sight, following their own vain pursuits and the concept of father did not exist. Any of the men could have been the father of a child but no one ever knew which was. All children knew their mother and a mother knew her own children, but all women had the nurturing and caring role of mother, and there were enough for all children to be treated equally. So God was a goddess for myriads of years.

When we come to Judaism and then Christianity, women have almost gone out of sight. Both religions have a masculine God and no goddess, masculine priests and no priestesses. Christianity also has a masculine son of God and what appears to be a masculine Holy Ghost. This trio constitutes the Christian “mystery” of the Trinity, but the logic of any such trinity is to have a father god, a mother god and a baby son god. Where, oh where has the mother god gone?

The answer is that it was expunged by the Persian administrators who set up the Jewish religion—in the image of Zoroastrianism—in the fifth century BC. Zoroaster had abolished all gods except one—Ahura Mazda—and some angels and demons of various descriptions, around two centuries before. Now that the Persians were conquering the world, they thought it a good idea to have everyone on earth subject to one God of Heaven, whatever his local name might have been, to match the one king of earth—the king of kings of Persia. Since the only God of Heaven had manifestly approved the appointment of the Persian king, everyone would recognize it as an unchallengeable divine appointment, and peace would reign!

Family squabbles could not be admitted into this scheme, and so goddesses were written out of sacred history. Of course, no Jew or Christian will accept this because they have accepted the propaganda that there is only one, masculine god, and, if it was ever different, it was because people were ignorant! Only the Jews were not ignorant because they had been specially selected by God in the time of Abraham, about 2000 BC to carry out His plan for human religious revelation. Unfortunately for all this, the Jews, or rather their predecessors often called Hebrews, did worship goddesses as even the Jewish scriptures admit! But, they were only the backsliders who refused to accept God’s word—for thus the Persian “restorers” of Judaism painted the inhabitants of the land into which the Persians transported the “returners from exile”.

The truth, as scholars know but do not publicly divulge, is that the religion of the people in the Hill Country of Palestine before the Persians arrived was recognisably the same religion as that of everyone else who lived in the Levant and its hinterland. The richer parts of the eastern Mediterranean left plentiful archaeological remains in the form of clay tablets, most famously at Ugarit, that tell us a lot about ancient Canaanite religions and their practice. The people here were called Canaanites and they worshipped a pantheon of gods and goddesses,



led by the supreme god, El, and his wife, Athirat (Asherah) and their son, Baal Hadad.

## **Canaanite Religion**

The paucity of archaeological remains from the Hill Country confirm the picture underlying the bible stories—the practices of the small population that lived there were the same as their neighbours. The accessible gods were called Baal, meaning Lord, just as Yehouah is habitually called and actually translated as Lord (Yehouah Elohim, Lord God). The Persians admitted one god only and eventually Yehouah prevailed, but it seems that bodies of people for some time preferred other gods, notably El (Elohim). The Canaanite title for their son of god, Baal, was villified by the “restorers” as the name of all false gods, whatever their real name, Hadad, Eshmun, Dagon, Milcom or whatever, and that is what we find in the bible.

Reading the bible carefully tells us that three goddesses were worshipped in the Hill Country later called Israel and Judah. The three were Asherah, Astarte and the Queen of Heaven. Possibly the latter is the title of one or both of the other two, but all three are mentioned, and the Queen of Heaven was so loved that the people refused Jeremiah’s pleas to turn from her to Yehouah!

Hundreds of small, mainly female figurines often of terracotta are found all over Palestine, many datable to the period of the supposed divided monarchy from 900 to 600 BC. Of these figurines of goddesses, some are Astarte from the symbolism, and they can be dated from 2000 BC to the capture of Jerusalem when they cease. Some Christian and Jewish “scholars” try to make out that these figurines are not goddesses at all but are magical talismans or primitive pornography, being models of prostitutes, but it is impossible to imagine that they do not have some ritual significance and must therefore be images of a goddess.

The images that seem identifiable with Astarte come in the form of plaques that seem to show a recess within which the image is displayed and therefore suggest that they are models of an image in a shrine. The plaques are impressed in terracotta using a mould and show the goddess with upraised arms holding serpents or lilies or both, though sometimes she holds her abdomen and sometimes has her hands by her sides. Often she is standing on the back of a lion. Her hair is dressed in the flicked style, looking rather like ram’s horns, typical of the Egyptian goddess Hathor, who had been popular in the south of the country—many of these plaques have been excavated at Devir near Hebron. In the Iron Age period, the preferred form of the goddess was that of an elongated bust, looking like a head and shoulders on a pillar, and therefore looking more phallic like the presumed Asherahs.

Commentators try to claim they are not Israelite but Canaanite, the two types of people living side by side for hundreds of years. Honest scholars today are asking how these populations can be so surely distinguished. All of the cultural evidence is that there was only *one* population. The need for two only arises to explain how what is read in the bible differs from what happened according to the evidence. So, only the need to fulfil biblical expectations makes anyone think that there were two different peoples in Palestine at this time. And the people that lived there were Canaanites who worshipped Baal and several goddesses.

## **Asherah**



Asherah was the Canaanite Venus, the Goddess of the Sea and the Mother of All the Gods. A lot is known about her from the Ugarit tablets that go back to the fourteenth century BC. She was the wife of the supreme god, El, whence her alternative name, Elath, the Goddess. Semitic deities commonly have two names, or rather a name and a title, and are known by either. The parallelism that characterizes Semitic verse might be the reason for the perpetuation of this habit, if not its origin, thus:

He cries to Asherah and her children,  
To Elath and the company of her offspring.

A stele has the inscription, "Qudsu Astarte Anat", suggesting that Qudsu was a name or title of Anat who is herself identified with Astarte. Asherah and Qudsu also appear in the parallelism of Semitic verse where Asherah says in one place:

I myself have not a house like the gods  
A court like the sons of Qudsu,

and elsewhere:

He came to qds  
Athirat of the Tyrians.

"*Qudsu*" ("*qds*"), the same as the biblical "*qadesh*" or "*kadesh*", means "holy" or "sacred", or the "Holy One", or "Sacred One". Moreover, the biblical Asherah is given as Ashtaroth in the plural, seemingly a plural of Astarte, though another plural is a masculine one, Asherim, doubtless part of the patriarchal plan to eliminate any hint of female deities. Asherim is conventionally translated as "groves". The Sumerians had a goddess called Ashratim who was also the consort of their supreme god, Anu, and so she is likely to be an earlier and perhaps the original epiphany of Asherah.

Asherah is also mentioned in the Amarna letters from fourteenth century BC Egypt. They are records of reports and correspondence from Egyptian officials and emissaries outside the country, and so are an importance resource. They show that already Asherah was either being confused with Astarte or the two goddesses were always the same one, differently named. The names are used interchangeably in the Amarna tablets. The letters make it clear that her worshippers regarded themselves as her "slaves". To this day Christians accept that they are "slaves" of God, although they wrongly translate the Greek for "slaves" as "servants".

Asherah was, then, a goddess known throughout the Fertile Crescent, but not according to traditionalists for God's plan, in Judah or Israel—at least officially. The seventeenth century translators of the *King James Version* of the bible hid the goddess quite from the view of the faithful by translating "Asherah" as "grove". *Judges* 3:7 admits that Baal and Asherah were worshipped in Israel (and God of course punished the Israelites for it). The goddess, Asherah, is actually mentioned forty times in the scriptures.

Several passages in the scriptures describe Asherahs being built or torn down, or uprooted. It seems they were pillars, usually of wood, occasionally of stone, effectively phallic symbols but of the form of a woman, though in *Micah* 5:14, they are masculine and therefore surely phallic objects. In fact, each locality had its shrine to the goddess and doubtless had local peculiarities, so that we read in the Amarna letters of the "Asherah of here" and the "Asherah of there", some of which might have been tree trunks still rooted in the earth, others of which were set up under trees and others of which were set up on the "high places".



*Judges* 6:25,28 says they also stood next to the altars of Baal, suggesting that Asherah was thought of as the consort or mother of Baal, and *2 Kings* 21:7 and 23:6 admit they stood in the Jerusalem temple. None of these Asherahs have survived, because they were deliberately destroyed by the priests of the Ezra school and its successors. But the terracotta dolls mentioned above seem likely to be household models of the full sized Asherahs, so we can get an idea of them.

In the scriptures, the stories about Asherah worship, the constant destruction and reintroduction of the symbols of the goddess, simply show the immense popularity she had among the Am ha Eretz (indeed the name "Am ha Eretz", usually understood to be the men of the land, the simple folk, might well be intended to signify Mother Earth).

In Jewish myth, Asherah worship was first introduced by women, the wife of Solomon or the wife of Ahab, the latter being the infamous Jezebel. The prophet Elijah took exception to the prophets of Baal and defeated them in a gratuitous show of supernatural power on Mount Carmel, but the prophetesses of Asherah seem to have been left to continue their practices. Prophetess might have been used in the accepted sense here because a fifteenth century BC Akkadian text speaks of a "wizard of Asherah" forecasting the future, so Asherah might have had a reputation for fortune telling.

The Asherah of Samaria, supposedly set up by Ahab for Jezebel (*1 Kgs* 16:33), was still standing a hundred

years later. Indeed, the impression is that the devotion of the people to Asherah was constant while the devotion to the male god fluctuated between Baal and Yehouah. Since, notwithstanding the fact that Asherah was properly the Mother of the Gods, she was also the consort of Baal or Yehouah—both mere sprogs of the supreme god—Asherah remained the female deity whichever of the male sons of god took precedence.

Bearing in mind the passages about the Queen of Heaven in Jeremiah, the reason why the shrines to Baal kept getting torn down might have been because Baal was the Lord (Baal) Yehouah, being pressed on to the Am ha Aretz by the priests of Yehouah, and being rejected repeatedly by the people who were devotees of the Goddess. The destruction of the sanctuaries to Baal therefore meant the destruction of the sanctuaries to Baal Yehouah. When the Yehouists eventually asserted their power at the beginning of the fourth century BC, the scriptural stories were anachronistically altered to suit the Yehouists.

Be that as it may, the scriptures record that the worshippers of this god of the Jews and Christians, Yehouah, invited all of the worshippers of Baal to a solemn assembly for their god at his sanctuary in Samaria, fitted them out in fresh vestments, then murdered them every one! The shrines to the bull god in Dan were not destroyed however and nor were the shrines to Asherah. If Yehouah was the only god allowed, one can only conclude that he was identified with the bull god and the goddess was his consort. In the story of the *Exodus*, the Israelites worshipped images of a bull, and a bull was a symbol of fertility.

The presence of the Asherah in Samaria for so long was made the mythical reason why the state of Israel was lost to the Assyrians, together with the ten lost tribes of Israel, but this is propaganda to justify the worshippers of Yehouah at Jerusalem—the Jews—hating the worshippers of Yehouah in Samaria—the Samaritans. In fact, the scriptures credit the king of Judah, Josiah, with “burning” the Samaritan Asherah about forty years before Jerusalem was finally sacked by the Babylonians. This was about a hundred years after Israel had supposedly ceased to exist and its people had been deported to be lost forever. In truth, it was probably only after the Persian administrators had imposed monotheism that the goddess was harmed, and the Asherah of Samaria destroyed.

In Judah, Ashtaroah are not mentioned at all, but king Asa finds it necessary to destroy them, so they must have been there all the time. His son, Jehoshaphat however, finds he has to destroy them all again! His son, Joash allowed them back and even placed an Asherah in the Jerusalem temple where it remained until the pious monarch, Hezekiah removed it over a hundred years later (2 Kgs 18:4). Hezekiah also destroyed a brass serpent that Moses had given the Israelites to worship! Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, restored the Asherah but not the brass snake, despite it having been a gift of the great Israelite leader.

The *Book of Deuteronomy* was then found, supposedly lost and forgotten since the time of Moses, but discovered “by accident” in the time of king Josiah, just 35 years before Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians. Plainly, the book was written by the returning “exiles” sent by the Persian king, who pretended that this law book had been discovered before they had even appeared on the scene. It forbade the building of Asherahs and pillars and had been just the sort of thing that would motivate a good Yehouist as Josiah was depicted as being. Yet, despite it, if Jeremiah is taken to be historical, the people still preferred the goddess and he later found himself defending Yehouah against the Queen of Heaven!

## **Anath**



*An Astarte plaque showing the goddess Astarte or Anath holding lilies or lotuses*

Anath was the sister of Baal Hadad and the daughter of Asherah in Canaanite mythology, and was identified with Astarte (Hebrew, Ashtoreth). She seems also to be Anahita, the later Persian goddess. It is curious to the modern mind why goddesses should be distinguished then evidently confused or conflated again, and it seems more than likely that the patriarchal religious leaders divided the original Great Mother Goddess into her aspects to weaken her, but the people effectively refused to see all the goddesses thus created as anything other than what they were—the Great Mother. Thus, Anath, Astarte and Asherah might have had different names but were seen as the same. We saw from the Amarna letters and the bible itself that Asherah was confused with Ashtoreth. The ancient tablets, using the Semitic parallelism mentioned above, have:

Whose fairness is like Anath's fairness;  
Whose beauty is like Ashtoreth's beauty.

The two goddesses are equated in these lines of verse, and such parallels led foreigners, the Egyptians for example, to think that here were two separate goddesses, whose equality must have meant they were sisters. According to Albright, however, Ramesses III called Anath and Astarte, his shield (singular) suggesting that he knew they were one goddess only.

Anath (Anthat, Anaitis) was a goddess of war and love in the Ugaritic tablets, a virgin goddess yet promiscuous and vicious. Anath's main lover was her brother, Baal Hadad, with whom she had intercourse by taking the form of a heifer. Baal is therefore a bull, just as Yehouah was at Dan and Bethel, and in the wilderness. As a war goddess she is ferocious, killing wildly and with glee until she has to wade in blood and gore, rather like the Indian goddess, Kali, also known as Annapurna. She has characteristics almost identical to those of Inanna of Sumeria and Ishtar of Akkadia who were called "Lady of Heaven" and "Mistress of the Gods", just as Anath and Astarte were in Egypt.

Ashtoreth refers to the womb, an appropriate reference for a fertility goddess, but one which shows that it is a descriptive title of the goddess Anath—Anath of the Womb, one could call her according to Raphael Patai (PAT-THG). Anath is often also called the "maiden", so, although a womb, she is a virgin. The Egyptians described them as the goddesses "who conceive but do not bear" because they were permanently virgins. Ashtoreth was also a goddess of war as the scriptures declare also when the Philistines offered Saul's armour in the temple of Ashtoreth (1 Sam 31:10) presumably as a token of appreciation for her assistance in the battle.

Anath is not mentioned in the scriptures and Ashtoreth or Astarte are mentioned only nine times, but she was much more important than such a small number of citations suggests. In *Judges* 2:13 and 10:6, Astarte and the Ashtaroth are respectively mentioned in conjunction with Baal, as warnings to the Israelites. Solomon is similarly warned by Yehouah (1 Kgs 11:5,33) for adopting Ashtoreth and other foreign gods.

Anath does appear in the scriptures as the place names Beth Anath and Anathoth or Anatha (even today still called Anata), the birthplace of Jeremiah, amongst others. Anathoth is simply the plural of Anath, a convention among the Hebrews in naming towns. Thus Ashtaroth, the plural of Ashtoreth is also a place name. These names arose because they were the place of a shrine (a house or “beth”) for the deity, and were therefore the place where the deity’s devotees lived—the Anaths (Anathoth) or the Astartes (Ashtaroth). One of the Judges, according to the scriptures, was a “son of Anath”, taken by the faithful to be literally true, but merely disguising that he was a follower or devotee of Anath.

## Queen of Heaven

Jeremiah tried to persuade the Israelite worshippers of the Queen of Heaven in Egypt to turn to Yehouah but they refused. Anath and Astarte were “Lady (Lady being the feminine of Lord, therefore meaning “ruler”) of Heaven” throughout the Near East, including Egypt. The people, in reply, think it is not through any neglect of Yehouah that they have had misfortune but because of their neglect of the goddess!

As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine.

And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men?

*Jeremiah 44:16-19*

Elsewhere in Jeremiah, the author adds more detail:

Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger.

*Jeremiah 7:17-18*

These are small windows into the genuine religion of Palestine before the Persians altered it. The author, clearly a propagandist for the Persian “returners” from “exile”, admits to the longstanding practice of the cities of Judah, and of Jerusalem itself. Their fathers—meaning in the first passage, ancestors, not just their immediate dads—their kings and princes had burnt incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured libations for her (the equal of the wine of the Eucharist). The women add that they made cakes for her (the equal of the Eucharist wafer), and



insist that they did not worship the goddess only as a female indulgence but did it with their menfolk. The earlier passage in *Jeremiah* shows that the whole practice was communal.

The cakes will have been made in moulds just like the moulds used to cast the terracotta figures of the goddess, found everywhere, or perhaps the terracotta figurines were themselves used to make an impression on the cakes, which were then baked and eaten or burnt as an offering. That the Queen of Heaven was Ashtoreth is suggested by the use of these cakes, because an ancient Babylonian text to Ishtar refers to sacrificial cakes using a name that seems to be cognate with the Hebrew word.

The people had been happy and well fed under the care of the goddess, but latterly had suffered hardship under the Babylonians and then the Persian administrators' efforts to bring in an exclusive new god, the Persian version of Yehouah. No one intelligent can read books like *Jeremiah*, *Isaiah*, *Ezekiel* and other prophetic books without seeing them as propagandistic pseudepigraphs written by the schools of Nehemiah and Ezra to persuade the native Palestinians to adopt the monotheistic religion the Persians were promoting for political reasons. These books nominally come from the two centuries before the "restoration" but were obviously anachronistically cast back in time to justify Persian novelties. The priestly schools blamed the troubles of the Am ha Eretz on to their old religious habits—and they laid it on thick—they were abominations!

In *Ezekiel*, the prophet is transported from Babylon to Jerusalem by God himself to see the abominations that are happening. The Persian reformers composed this to justify Ezra's alterations to worship in the city of Jerusalem. The abominations are a phallic image ("an image of jealousy that provokes jealousy"), presumably an Asherah; the worship of a variety of images; the worship of Tammuz, the dying and rising god whose consort was Ishtar (Ashtoreth); the worship of the sun that was doubtless an aspect of El, Baal and Yehouah as sky gods. The Persians apparently were not against the vision of the sun being used as an aspect of their transcendental god, Ormuzd, because Mithras was apparently exactly that, but they would not have anything worshipped except for the God of Heaven himself. Mithras transformed himself for the Jews into the archangel Michael, guardian angel of the faithful of Yehouah, a mighty prince of the heavenly hosts but only an angel.

An Aramaic papyrus from the Jewish military colony at Hermopolis in Egypt speaks of a temple to the Queen of Heaven in the fifth century BC, just when the priests of Nehemiah or Ezra would have been forging the *Jeremiah* pseudepigraph, on our surmise. We know from the Elephantine papyri that the Jews of Elephantine were still worshipping other gods and goddesses besides Yehouah, including Anath, around 400 BC!

## **Yehouah's Spouse**



**Utterance of Ashyaw the king: Say to Yehallel and to Yaw'asah  
and to... I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and his asherah**

At Kuntillet Ajrud in the Negeb 30 miles from Kardesh Barnea, excavation of an eighth century sanctuary by the University of Tel Aviv in 1975-1976 revealed inscriptions, including Hebrew prayers, that have still not been published 30 years later. The text of one prayer was illustrated with two rough figures like the brutish Egyptian god, Bes, and spoke of “Yehouah and his Asherah”. This was a severe kick in the teeth for traditional Jewish and Christian monotheists of the “God’s Plan” variety. Asherah is a Ugaritic goddess, the consort of El. The people of eighth century BC Palestine had this same goddess, and she was considered the consort of Yehouah. Yehouah seemed even closer than ever to Baal or El. The Arabs before the foundation of Islam also had a goddess Asherah, and the Nabataean Arabs, judging by many inscriptions they made in Sinai in the second and third centuries AD, worshipped a god called “Ywh”. The fifth century Jewish colony at Elephantine on the Nile, similarly had Yehouah paired with a goddess Anath-Yehouah.

In the bible, Asherah is depicted as a cult object apparently a wooden pillar or tree trunk, but translated often as “grove”. Fighting fires and painting over cracks or whatever other metaphor comes to mind—they all apply—biblicists claim that God’s asherah was just a candlestick or altar, or they concede that some evil Jews did allow Yehouah to have a wife and that is why the Jews were always being punished, or anything that sounds plausible as long as it does not mean that Yehouah was not a perpetual batchelor. But as Theodore Lewis points out in the *Oxford Companion to the Bible*:

The asherah symbol in its origin is not easily divorced from the goddess Asherah.

The archaeological evidence is that the “pre-exilic” Israelites worshipped first and foremost, a goddess whose spouse was titled Baal and sometimes called Yehouah—the causer of being (meaning existence, life). The people saw the goddess as the accessible deity, even if notionally Yehouah or El were superior gods in the hierarchy. In the same way, Christians pray to Jesus or to Mary or even to saints instead of the omniscient god because they clearly do not believe that God is omniscient. And they obviously finish up just as satisfied praying to an old dead bishop as they do to the Almighty God of heaven Himself!

The Persians stopped goddess worship and replaced the old Baal Yehouah with a new god of heaven in the image of Ahuramazda. The constant theme of the Jewish scriptures of apostasy began here, Ezra’s priests

portrayed the old religion as a perversion and an abomination of the wishes of the new god, and created an imaginary history of relapsing into religious perversion to justify the change. The prophets were pseudepigraphic propaganda supporting this scheme. Interestingly, later on, after the new god had been accepted, Jews became so protective of the new god that they refused to accept the gods of the Greeks and eventually started the Maccabaeen wars. The works written to persuade the Am ha Eretz to adopt the new god were now seen as directed against the Hellenizing Jews who wanted to adopt Greek ways.

Yet, despite this manipulation, the Jews would not give up their attachment to a goddess. It simply had to find new forms, acceptable to those whose only deity was a lonely and invisible Almighty.

One way that is plain in the scriptures, is that the land and people of Yehouah, Israel itself, appeared in place of Asherah or Anath as the betrothed or the wife of God. The goddess remained in the Jewish world view but as a metaphor for the object of the love of Yehouah—his people. This fitted in so well with Persian aims that it is conceivable that they used it as a way of weaning the native Israelites off their attachment to the Goddess, just as Christians permitted Pagan gods to be seen as Christian saints. At any rate it is a strong theme through many of the Persian books of the scriptures.

Those who refused to abandon the old ways in favour of the new Yehouah were portrayed as a wanton wife, a promiscuous Israel, an unworthy bride or wife. If “His people” abandoned the old ways, then Yehouah would forgive them of their sins and repent of His anger, and approach Israel to unite with her, his erstwhile unfaithful wife, in a grand marriage, to which the faithful would be invited but not the remaining apostates. We have suggested elsewhere that this marriage ceremony was celebrated as a ritual by the Essenes, at least (the wedding at Cana), but whether it is a carry over of some older ceremony in which Baal Yehouah “married” his consort is unclear, though quite likely. The older ceremonies were blatantly sexually promiscuous and the new symbolic ceremony which replaced the previous Bacchic-like revels was doubtless seen as a progression to total decorum.

The old goddess became personified as Zion, the city of Jerusalem representing those who worshipped Yehouah—the Jews or Yehudim, a word apparently related to “yahad” meaning a tightly knit community. Zion was a loving mother or a tender and affectionate daughter to Yehouah—the roles of the goddesses Asherah (mother of Baal) and Anath (daughter of El). She became even more important in the Hellenistic period when she represented the aspirations of the Jews for a kingdom of God—independence from the Greeks.

## **Cherubim**

The reputation of Judaism as an aniconic religion—one which does not permit images—evidently was built after the Persian “restoration”. The making of “any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth (Ex 20:4)” was written in by the priests of Ezra to prevent the people of the Hill Country from reverting to their Asharoth. Yet cherubim decorated the walls of Jewish temples until the end of the temple of Herod in 70 AD. Surely these were “graven images”.

Christians, unassailable in their perpetual ignorance, think cherubim are baby angels like the putti of the medieval illustrators. Well they were indeed winged creatures but they were more like the griffins, winged bulls and winged lions of Assyria than podgy baby angels, though angelic figures were also cherubs. These fabulous

creatures were popular all over the ancient Near East for thousands of years, but perhaps reached their artistic zenith under the Assyrians. They were certainly brought by the Persian priests of Ezra from Babylonia, where they decorated thrones, gates and walls. Support for this is the word itself which is not from a Hebrew root. The nearest word for it is found in Akkadian tablets where it stands for an intermediary between humans and god—an winged beast that carries human prayer to god.



Cherubs are first mentioned as having been set to guard the entrance to the Garden of Eden with a flaming sword after the expulsion of humanity (Gen 3:24). In *Exodus* (25:18-22; 37:7-9), lengthy instructions are giving for the construction of the Ark of the Covenant with its Mercy Seat and decorated curtains. Cherubim were the decorative motif. In 2 *Samuel* 2:11, God rides on a cherub and in Ezekiel's vision four cherubim carry the throne of God.

Elsewhere, God sits enthroned on the Ark's cherubim (2 Sam 6:2; 1 Chron 13:7; Ps 80:1) or sits between them (Ex 25:22; Num 7:89). And in the *Psalms*, Yehouah "rides on the wings of the wind" (Ps 104:5) or "upon the clouds" (Ps 68:5) or "makes the clouds his chariot" (Ps 104:5). In 2 *Samuel* 22:11, we read:

And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: and he was seen upon the wings of the wind.

*Psalms* 18:10 is equally explicit and emphatic that a cherub stands for the wings of the wind:

And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.



These descriptions explain to us what the cherubim that supported god or his throne were. The Jewish scriptures are describing the common near eastern representation of God, or His Fravashi, used by the Persians and other nations like the Assyrians. The Egyptians also used a similar device—a winged disc that was often shown hovering over a dead person or a religious scene, standing for the soul of the dead or perhaps, more abstractly, for the protective power of god—holiness.

The Egyptians liked to picture Horus between the twin goddesses, Isis and her sister, Nephthys, shown as mirror images of female cherubim, with the winged disc floating above, doubtless representing god as Ra. Equivalent pictures are found in Mesopotamia with two winged gods or goddesses (cherubs) tending a sacred palm tree overlooked by the holy ideogram. This is doubtless the type of scene described as the one on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. Furthermore, it sounds like the scene repeated several times in *1 Kings* as being the general motif of the chambers of the temple:



**Goddesses in the form of cherubim with stylized palm tree like the description of those decorating the temple; from Nimrud, Assyria, 900 BC**

And he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of Cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, within and without... The two doors also were of olive tree and he carved upon them carvings of Cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold, and spread gold upon the Cherubim, and upon the palm trees. So also made he for the door of the temple posts of olive tree... And he carved thereon Cherubim and palm trees and open flowers: and covered them with gold fitted upon the carved work. (1 Kings 6:29-35)



**Gods in the form of cherubim with stylized palm tree like the description of those decorating the temple; from Nimrud, Assyria, 900 BC**



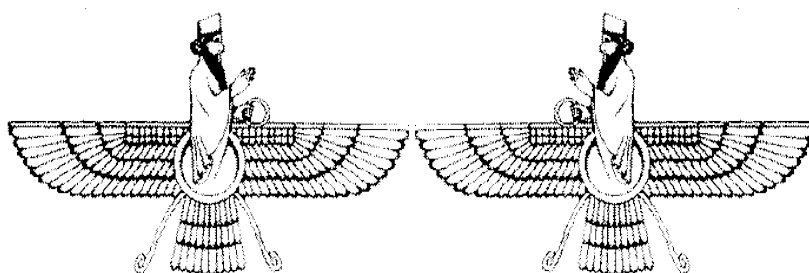
The description of the visionary temple in Ezekiel matches this (doubtless it was written first) and adds the detail that the cherubs faced alternately just as they do in the Assyrian pictures. Only the Janus-like nature of the heads differs:

And it was made with Cherubim and palm trees, so that a palm tree was between a cherub and a cherub; and every cherub had two faces; So that the face of a man was toward the palm tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm tree on the other side: it was made through all the house round about. From the ground unto above the door were Cherubim and palm trees made, and on the wall of the temple... And there were made on them, on the doors of the temple, Cherubim and palm trees, like as were made upon the walls; and there were thick planks upon the face of the porch without. (Ezek 41:18-20;25)

Even the ten wash stands in the temple were set on bases which had a decorative motif of palms, bulls, lions and cherubim.

The two cherubs placed in the Holy of Holies of the temple, however, from their description in the scriptures, seem more like the ideogram of Ahura Mazda:

And in the most holy house he made two cherubim of image work, and overlaid them with gold. And the wings of the cherubim were twenty cubits long: one wing of the one cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the other wing was likewise five cubits, reaching to the wing of the other cherub. And one wing of the other cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the other wing was five cubits also, joining to the wing of the other cherub. The wings of these cherubims spread themselves forth twenty cubits: and they stood on their feet, and their faces were inward. (2 Chronicles 3:10-13; see also 1 Kings 6:23-28)



**Is this how the cherubim in the temple Devir at Jerusalem looked?**

The cherubim were miraculous because they faced each other only when Yehouah favoured Israel but they faced away from each other when Israel had earned God's ill will. But why were there two when there is only one god? In Rabbinic tradition, there are two cherubim to stand for each of God's holy names, Yehouah and Elohim, and, though this is much later than the origin of these images with the Persians, it could be true. There seem to have been two factions, each rooting for their preferred god, further proof that the religion of the Israelites before the arrival of the Persians was polytheistic.

Now Judaeo-Christian tradition has always been that the Holy of Holies of the temple was empty, once the Ark of the Covenant had disappeared from it, despite the descriptions of the cherubim in the scriptures. In fact, there



must always have been fires burning in there if only for the burning of incense, but fires were holy themselves in Persian tradition and considered to be good spirits that took the prayers of the faithful up to god along with the sweet incense. Rabbi Hanina in the first century AD reports that there was a fire on the altar, and this was obviously not the altar for burnt offerings which stood outside the Holy Place, and necessarily had a fire. This altar is distinguished in *Exodus* 38:1 from the altar of incense of *Exodus* 37:25. The Holy of Holies and the Holy Place were a single room, separated only by a veil.

The Ark was meant to rest beneath the touching outstretched wings of the cherubs, but the loss of the Ark would not have stopped the temple authorities from maintaining the cherubs. Only the Ark was unique and irreplaceable. These cherubs are both shown as masculine in appearance, just as Yehouah is always taken to be masculine in every respect. A later reason for there being two images was that one of the cherubim in the Holy of Holies of the second temple was female—the goddess had not really disappeared at all!

The basis for this belief is also the Talmud, which tells us that the two cherubs in the Devir of the temple were a copulating couple! Well, the Talmud actually says they were “entwined” like a man and his wife. This explicit sculpture was displayed to the pilgrims on each of the three major festivals—Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles.

Both Philo of Alexandria and Josephus must have known what was in the Devir, but both are cagey or contradictory. Philo says that the High Priest is so blinded by the incense smoke when he enters that even he cannot see what is in there, and Josephus says that nothing is there, then that what is there is quite respectable, and lastly he admits that there are some items of sacred paraphernalia in there.

Both must have known, because Josephus had served as a priest and Philo had visited Jerusalem as a pilgrim. Rabbi Quetina, according to Raphael Patai, says that the priests would roll up the veil separating off the Holy Place when pilgrims arrived to show them the “cherubim that were intertwined with one another”, and declare:

Behold! Your love before God is like the love of male and female.

The pilgrims would then indulge in orgiastic behaviour, as they had done under the old religion, as the incident of the golden calves proves:

And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings, and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. (Ex 32:6)

No prizes are offered here for the real meaning of the mistranslation “play”. The same Hebrew word is mistranslated differently when the Philistine king, who thinks Rebekah is Isaac’s sister, sees them through his window (Gen 26:8):

Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife.

Yes, the word “l’zaheq” means having nooky. The Jews had been subject to the same religious influences as everyone else in the ancient Near East. Their original religion was a fertility religion based on the cycle of the

seasons. If these people wanted the rains to come and the land to be fertile, what reason could they have had for not showing the gods precisely what they required? The sexual act was a sacred act of the cycle of living, and the hierophants revealed the sacred object that stimulated the act. It would have been impossible for them to have remained chaste when they wanted the land to be fertile.

Doubtless the Persian schools could not have tolerated such behaviour, which suggests it only resumed after Alexander's conquest. The priests were, of course, interested in multiplying the seed of Abraham, who were their bread and butter, and the Greek regime was sexually liberal, so that the new generation of Hellenized priests had good reason for promoting occasional orgies, even if the Jews had become otherwise prudish under Zoroastrian influence. Effectively they were re-admitting the old religion of Baal and the Queen of Heaven, but under the guise of a mystery religion in which the cult objects were revealed periodically only to the faithful. Naturally, traditional Jews—those now committed to the religion introduced by the Persians—would have seen all of this as abominable. They became the Hasidim who split into Pharisees and Essenes.

Elsewhere, the Talmud describes the discovery of the entwined cherubs by foreigners violating the temple's sanctity:

They entered the Holy of Holies and found there the two cherubim, and they took them and put them in a cage and went around with them in the streets of Jerusalem and said: "You used to say that this nation was not serving idols. Now you see what we found and what they were worshipping".

These violators are supposed to have been Ammonites and Moabites, but the only historical event that it could correspond to before the restoration was the capture and robbing of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, and the Persian "restorers" would have included evidence of such an abomination in the salutary works they wrote that now constitute the prophetic books of scripture. The event therefore took place in the Greek period when it became normal for Jews to refer to the Greeks by the scriptural names of their gentile enemies. The Ammonites and Moabites must therefore have been really Greeks and the desecration and parading of the sculptures in cages must have happened before the Maccabean war. The desecration of Antiochus Epiphanes in 170 BC seems the likely occasion.

The old cherubim in the shape of the ideogram of Ormuzd must have been replaced by the sensuous statue of copulating cherubs after the defeat of the Persians by the Greeks. Patai suggests that the change was effected by Ptolemy Philadelphus who made several expensive gifts to the Jewish temple and began the translation of the Torah into Greek. Perhaps more likely is his son Ptolemy III Euergetes, who was a noted Judaeophile and even worshipped at the Jerusalem temple, according to Josephus. His son, Ptolemy Philopator, wanted also to worship in the temple but was prevented from doing so and planned to massacre Jews in revenge. He regarded the Jews as being devotees of Dionysos and therefore had Jewish slaves tattooed with a vine leaf.

When the Maccabees rededicated the temple in 165 BC, did they restore the statuary destroyed by Antiochus Epiphanes? It seems they did, because the cageyness of Philo and Josephus suggest it, and the fact that the Hasids fell out with the Hasmonaeans has the same implications. The excuse given by apologists is that some Hasids objected to the Maccabees taking the priesthood, reserved for the Zadokites, but the real reason will be that they had returned the institutions to those of the Greek inclined sect of the Sadducees, who claimed they were the heirs of the Zadokites, instead of back to the religion introduced by the Persians.

Nevertheless, for many Jews the attraction of the goddess remained and she had had a metaphorical existence as the bride of God, Israel. The explicit statue must have seemed to many a graphic illustration of the intimacy of Yehouah and His people, and therefore did not seem in the least improper. And a goddess equal to Yehouah had reappeared as the female cherub in the statue. It took the growing strength of the Persian parties, the Pharisees and the Essenes to pressurize the priesthood into segregating men and women and preventing them from indulging in sexual flippery when the mysteries were revealed.

Women, who had previously had a temple court of their own giving direct sight of the revealed cherubs, were relegated to second class citizens in galleries having no view of it. The goddess was to fade again into metaphor and the poetic constructions of the Shekinah, the Wisdom of God and the Holy Ghost before the Christians even masculinized even that.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 2. How Persia Created Judaism**  
**The Glory of God in The East**

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### **Yehouah of Hosts?**

Yehouah of Hosts” and the “Hosts of Heaven” occur often in the Jewish scriptures. This Yehouah of Hosts is often described as sitting enthroned on the cherubim. The conspicuous object sitting among the host of heaven is the sun, and a reference in the El Amarna tablets is to a “sun of thousands”, a Canaanite expression closely similar to Yehouah of Hosts. *Psalms* 80 has a refrain repeated three times:

*Turn us again, O Yehouah, God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine and we shall be saved.*

Psalms 80:3,7,19

And:

*O Yehouah of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold.*

The clergy for whom these books are the word of an invisible and transcendental god, do not read them themselves, or when they do they invite us to believe that all of this imagery is metaphorical! K Vollers in 1900 told us that Yehouah was a sun god, but those with a vested interest in religion, the pious liars, closed ranks against him, and over a century later, few believers have been made any the wiser. No reasonable person can avoid concluding that Yehouah was once the sun, whatever the clergy say He is today. As H-P Stahlh has shown, Jewish prayers, as late as the Greek period sometimes explicitly identified Yehouah with Helios, the Greek sun god:

Hail, Helios, thou God in the heavens, your name is Almighty.  
Helios on the cherubim.

Yet, in *Deuteronomy*, worship of the sun is twice specifically forbidden. In *Deuteronomy* 4:19, the worship of heavenly bodies is expressly forbidden. That it should have to be forbidden so emphatically, however, shows that it was a practice that had been happening. Moreover, the law stated that the host of heaven should not be worshipped by the people addressed, the Jews—they had been provided by God for other nations to worship. The next passage, *Deuteronomy* 17:3, is even more emphatic, saying that worshippers of the heavenly bodies must be stoned to death. J Glen Taylor (*Yahweh and the Sun*, Sheffield, 1993), for whom we are indebted for much of this material, suggests that the real issue in these commandments that seem to have been so flagrantly ignored is iconism—not that Yehouah was not conceived as the sun or the heavenly host but that He could not be depicted as them.

Perhaps so, but more likely might be that these verses have been added to the law at a later date when the evolution of the religion had led it into a belief in an invisible and transcendental god. The fact that Yehouah is now seen as an invisible god, both immanent and transcendental at the same time, does not mean He was always thus, and the bible shows it. Religions are conservative institutions, it is true, but even they evolve, and

occasionally undergo revolutions. Sadly, believers cannot accept evolution in religion any more than many of them can accept it in life. They cannot conceive that human beings can add to and delete from, and alter texts, even holy ones, and so they finish believing what is impossible, contrary to the brain that they have in their heads, presumably courtesy of their own god.

If Yehouah was not represented by the Host of Heaven and had no idolatrous or astrological connexions, it is hard to see why much of the paraphernalia of the tabernacle, temple and the priesthood was manifestly astrological, according to reputable commentators such as Josephus and Clement of Alexandria. How is it possible for a Yehouah of the Hosts of Heaven to live in a wooden box in a tent, or even in a temple?

The explanation is that Yehouah was originally worshipped outdoors, beneath the celestial hemisphere, in *al fresco* churches on hills called “high places”. Even after the temple had been introduced, a controversial act, altars were set up on its roofs, to imitate a “high place”, where hymns and prayers would be sung to the heavens at night and the sun from before dawn to dusk at the several stations it passed through on its journey across the sky.

Yehouah was originally a Canaanite Baal, a storm god, but the Yehouah as we know Him began as Ahuramazda, the Persian High God, who wore the heavens as His “massy cloke” showing that He was mightier than the host of heaven because they were merely His outer appearance. Thus it was that the Persian colonists introduced Him to the Jews as Yehouah of Hosts (Yehouah Sebaoth).

The Persians originally had no idea of worshipping a god of the universe in a confined space, and did it in the open on natural or artificial mounds, but, after about 100 years of empire, the Persian royal family had been civilized by the Babylonians and their habits were asserting themselves. Babylonians worshipped in temples, albeit pyramid shaped ones. These temples also acted as banks and treasuries. The Persians set one up in Jerusalem.

The Persians seemed to rationalize the worship of a cosmic god in a “house” by regarding the house as a stairway or bridge to heaven, as apparently the Babylonians did. Like the Babylonian models, it was built on a series of ascending platforms, with the highest one reserved for God—the Holy of Holies—a sort of gateway to the cosmos. This room had its entrance oriented to the east, so that for a few days twice a year the rising sun would directly illuminate the otherwise dark and windowless room, filling it with the glory of God.

Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.

*Ezekiel 43:1*

The glory of God can only be solar. These occasions were the two equinoxes, when the religious and the civic years began.

In the Holy of Holies, God is conceived of as sitting on the Ark of the Covenant between the cherubim. Cherubim are winged sphinx-like creatures that guarded entrances and thrones. Particularly large examples were found in the ruins of Assyria. In the bible they are identified as having four faces, and these equate with the four

constellations at the four zodiacal points—Aquarius, Leo, Taurus, Eagle (Scorpio). Christians will note that these are the four images of the evangelists! Thus, cherubs are celestial objects which, in the scriptural metaphor, God, being the sun, could ride on with the clouds.

He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way...

*Genesis 3:24*

Philo Judaeus certainly knew the author of *Genesis* was talking about astrological symbols, the flaming sword turning every way being none other than the sun itself that dwelt between the Taurus and the Eagle, the equinoctial zodiacal symbols. The angel of Yehouah also wielded a flaming sword, doubtless identifiable with the sun, and Eden was originally the dawn sky, “eden” meaning “delight”. In between the equinoxes, the sun sank to the level of man, the water carrier, at the winter solstice in capricorn, and rose to the lion, Judah, at the summer solstice in Leo.

#### **The Law of Moses**

Hammurabi had his regal law presented by the sun-god Shemesh, shown with rays emanating from his shoulders on a black diorite stela inscribed in cuneiform now in the Louvre. The god holds a ring and staff in his right hand. Hammurabi wears a long robe, but his right arm and shoulder are bare. He is shown with a beard and shaved upper lip. This famous bas-relief is an early precedent (circa 1792-1750 BC) for codes of law being handed down by gods. Below the figure, Hammurabi declares:

When Marduk commissioned me to guide the people aright... I established law and justice in the language of the land.

Many centuries later, when the Jewish religion was set up by the Persians whose capital was Babylon in Mesopotamia, they too received their laws from a sun god—Yehouah.

## **The Zodiac**

When the stargazers of old first collected the pictures they imagined the stars made in the heavens, they seem to have understood the year as beginning at the spring equinox. They associated the rising of the sun in the constellation they saw as Taurus at the spring equinox, and said that was when the year began. The heliacal rising of the sun was seen as the sun killing the bull, as the solar light extinguished the stars of Taurus at dawn. People were concerned for the fertility of the fields in the coming season, and the scientists of their day, the astronomer-priests, whose job it was to keep the world running smoothly, advised people to kill a bull to promote fertility. This practice must have started around 3000 BC, and became the basis of religious sacrifice for millennia. Many myths grew out of it, but among them was the thought that sun gods must be great cattle herders that they could carry on killing heavenly bulls every year, and so it is that sun gods in myths often keep large herds of cattle.

Of course, the tilt of the earth is not forever in the same direction. It slowly rotates backwards so that it covers



a full circuit in about 26,000 years. To the priests for whom the heavenly bodies seemed so orderly compared with the chaos of the earth, it must have come as a shock when they noticed that the spring equinox was no longer in Taurus but was between Taurus and Aries. Perhaps they took no notice, thinking their predecessors were just stretching the truth a little, but before long there was no denying it—the heliacal rising of the sun at the vernal equinox was more in Aries than in Taurus!



**Priests and scribes in the top level await the peasants and farmers who bring their produce in gratitude. British Museum, Sumerian inlaid panel dated 2000 BC.**

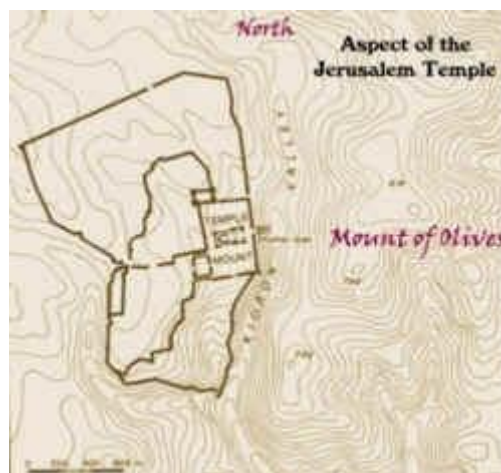
This must have been obvious by about 1500 BC. Doubtless it was impossible to suddenly change the myths by then. Great religions depended on them, and the astronomical meaning of them might never have been known by the ordinary peasant farmers who merely did as the priests instructed, sang hymns to the gods and offered sacrifices to propitiate them—a convenient way for the priests to live without having to plough a field or feed a cow.

Still, the professional astronomer-priests can hardly have failed by now to have noticed that heavenly fact and the myths were out of kilter. The sun god was now killing a ram or a lamb when it rose heliacally at the spring equinox, and they must have had flocks of heavenly sheep. Perhaps they were fearful of what might happen to them if they let on. It was always a dodgy profession when cruel kings had to have bad news. It would have been a big shock to know that the sun god was now merely a shepherd.

Whatever the reason, they were not willing, or it was impossible to change the habits of the past two millennia, and the old myths stuck. The slightest concession might have been that the God of Hosts was indicating that a ram or lamb was now acceptable to people who could not afford an ox. The priests would not have objected to that because it would have brought in more sacrifices to keep them plump.

Now, despite this, it seems that the Persians who founded the Jerusalem temple, and themselves were traditionally cattle herders, decided that the appropriate sacrifice for the people coming to Jerusalem did not have to be a cow. The country was essentially sheep country which was a practical factor, but God had indicated He was quite happy to accept sheep. By the fifth century BC, when the temple was founded, the sun was actually moving out of Aries at the spring equinox towards Pisces. The Jewish celebration called the Passover (Pesach), held at the spring equinox, can only mean it was a celebration of the equinox itself, when the sun “passed over” from the lower celestial hemisphere to the higher one. The prescribed sacrifice was a lamb. The Persians called Aries, not the constellation of the Ram, but the constellation of the Lamb, and the equinoctial sun rising in the Lamb is what the Jews were invited to celebrate.

## Temple Paraphernalia



Orientation of the Jerusalem Temple

What are the paraphernalia of the temple that show it was the centre of an astrological sect? First, its eastward orientation must have been related to the sun. East of the Jerusalem temple was the mount of Olives. We know it was oriented towards the mount of Olives because in the *Mishnah*, the priest sacrificing the red heifer on the mount could look directly into the temple. Not all ANE temples were oriented east but many were not temples of sun gods. The mount of Olives, 3400 feet (a kilometer) away from the temple, blocked the direct view of the eastern horizon because it rose 60 meters (200 feet) above the height of the temple mount. The sun was therefore delayed from actual dawn by the time it shone on the temple, having had to rise 4 degrees above the horizon. It had to rise not above the mount of Olives, the Greek word “Elaion” but above El Elyon, as it is properly, meaning the Most High God. So, the equinoctial dawn at the Jerusalem temple was when the sun shone directly into the Holy of Holies from the Most High God!

In the vestibule of the temple was a table with four legs, common in itself, but interpreted to stand for the four quarters of the earth. Upon it were the twelve loaves of the shewbread, supposedly standing for the twelve tribes but, as there were more than twelve, no one knows which twelve they stood for. Josephus, although Jewish, was not so naïve, telling us there was a loaf for each month, and therefore for each constellation traversed by the sun in its annual journey.

The menorah was a golden candlestick, or more likely a lamp stand, with seven lamps, a central one with three on each side. These represented, it is said, the days of the week with the day of creation, Wednesday, in the centre, but it is also as Persian an image as it is possible to get. Ahuramazda is both God and the Holy Spirit, the central lampstand, and the three on each side are the other six major spirits or archangels of the Persian religion. The Persian kings were depicted in an identical way—the king central and three royal princes or advisers on each side.

Ahuramazda means the “Lord of Light” which is why Mazda was adopted as the name of a brand of electric light bulb. The Lord of Light is the sun. The Persians nevertheless considered their god as invisible and impossible to represent, and nor did they. How so?

Ahuramazda was the sun behind the sun, indeed behind the heavens—the sun that made the whole of the celestial host shine. Zoroaster tried to eliminate most of the pantheon of Indo-European gods, but some were too well loved and his reforms did not have enough centuries to get rid of these favourites. Mithras, one of many ancient sun gods, was apparently rejected by Zoroaster but was popular, and soon became identified with the Holy Spirit.

Thus, Mithras survived as the main aspect of Ahuramazda—the face of God, so to speak. He was the sun of justice and of victory over evil, and so governed covenants and battles, and later, in Roman times, became popular with merchants and soldiers. He was the god of the dawn and the morning sun and was worshipped at the solar stations from before dawn up to noon. Mithras was seen as the visible face of God—the sun itself—even though the sun was not Mithras! Since he was also the Holy Spirit, he was the “Angel of the Lord” in scriptural terms.

Now the concept of the High God with six advisers simply comes from the seven recognized planets. The sun was the main one then there was the moon, and the other five that could be observed in those days without telescopes, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus and Mercury. As Clement of Alexandria put it, remarking on the meaning of the menorah, the central sun, illuminated the other planets in “a certain divine harmony”.

R Hayward notes the solar symbolism of the temple of Leontopolis, founded in Egypt by the priest Onias (III or IV), much later than the Jerusalem temple, in the Greek period about 170 BC. Josephus said that this temple, which was closed down by the Romans after the Jewish war in 71 AD, was illuminated by a single lamp, hanging by a chain, that cast a brilliant light. Since Josephus, Philo and the rabbis all agreed that the Menorah stood for the sun and the planets, the single brilliant lamp at Leontopolis must have been the sun alone. The lamp was golden in colour and was described by Josephus in divine language.

The entrance to the Holy of Holies was normally covered by a “veil”. We have become used to thinking of a veil as a gauzy fabric meant to cover the lower part of a woman’s face, but the real point of it is to conceal. The temple veil was a substantial curtain that concealed what was in the Holy of Holies. This curtain was woven with astrological themes in four colours, described as purple, blue, scarlet and linen, presumably the white or pale yellow now called flaxen.

Both Josephus and Clement of Alexandria say the four colours stood for the four elements, which needless to say were venerated by the Persians—water, air, fire and earth respectively. Perhaps this is so, but the four colours are also the colours of the dawn sky, from the deep indigo purple of the disappearing night in the west through the blue of the sky and the fiery red of the sky at the horizon, to the whiteness of the solar disk itself.

The priests of the temple normally wore plain white linen but on ceremonial occasions the High Priest had brilliant robes of the same colours as the veil. He also wore five gems and two carbuncles representing the seven planets once again. The two carbuncles would therefore be the sun and the moon, one would imagine, but Clement says they were Saturn and the moon.

This illustrates a curiosity that stems back to the Semitic sun god, Shemesh, and is an odd piece of evidence for Shemesh being the god of the temple. Saturn is often called Shemesh too! Diodorus Siculus says it is because the Babylonians considered Saturn to be the “Star of the Sun”. The point is that the sun was the king—God—the cosmic king—and Saturn was the earthly king. Both were Melech and both were Shemesh. In astrological terms, the fate of the king was judged by the heavenly fate of Saturn. This oddity also accounts for some of the occasions when Shemesh is visible, in old records, at night!



Jewish priest in white robe tied with a long girdle, in a Zoroastrian fashion



Jewish High Priest holding an almond branch, the equivalent of the Magian's baresman twigs

The High Priest's robe was also decorated with silver bells alternating with silver pomegranates. There were 366 of each, apparently tying in with the days in a year bar the odd one, but this could be explained if the priests were counting the maximum number of days in a year—on a

leap year. The solar year was twelve months of 30 days, with, the Egyptians had decided, five intercalary days given special respect as the birthdates of the five main deities. They were short by a  $\frac{1}{4}$  day, leading to the supposed Sothic cycle of 1460 years. The Persians apparently knew that sometimes an additional day had to be intercalated just as we do and the maximum length of the year was therefore 366 days. The year itself was probably identified with God as the full rotation of the heavens, and the six extra days would have been attributed to the six archangels, or Amesha Spentas, in Persian.

The pomegranates were supposed to represent the stars in the heavens, perhaps because their many seeds would seem uncountable. Josephus however, said the bells were thunder and the pomegranates were lightning. These were considered as celestial phenomena also in those days, and prophecies were issued based on them notably in relation to the phases of

the moon.

The High Priest also wore twelve precious stones as the zodiacal signs, Josephus confirms, in four rows for the two equinoxes and the two solstices that divide the solar year into quarters, and we identify now with the seasons, although in those days it is doubtful they recognised autumn (Fall). The year was essentially divided into two—summer and winter—but the emergence of vegetation with the rainy season was recognized as a special time of year, as was the harvest. Two bright emeralds on the priestly ephod were the sun and the moon, but Josephus says that the robe was clasped with two sardonyxes which were the sun and the moon.

## Crucifixion in Gibeon

The scriptures provide plenty of evidence that the Israelites were familiar with sun worship, as J Duss showed in 1960.

J L Crenshaw has noted the plain evidence for solar mythology in the story of Samson. Samson is the name of the Semitic sun god, Shemesh. A Mithraic plaque shows a lion with a bee in its mouth, and refers to Leo being the zodiacal sign when honey is best found. Ovid explains the human ritual of tying burning brands to foxes' tails and releasing them into the fields in the month of Ceres. A boy caught a fox breaking into a hen house, and tied burning brands to it to burn it to death as a punishment, but the fox escaped and burnt the fields. This is simply a cruel but effective way of burning stubble, justified as a punishment for foxes, but fires and burning are typical of solar mythology. When Samson pushed over the pillars in the temple of Dagon, the symbolism is the sun setting in the west beyond the pillars of Hercules. The sun sets beyond the pillars and enters the underworld for a night—it dies. So did Samson.

Beth Shemesh is a place name that appears several times in the Jewish scriptures. It means the House or Temple of Shemesh, the sun god. A notable Beth Shemesh is mentioned in the Egyptian execration texts of about the eighteenth century BC, and so must have been Canaanite. It might have been the Beth Shemesh in the Shephalah, about 15 miles from Jerusalem. Many place names with solar implications in the region suggest it was a centre of a solar cult, but other than the Samson stories, set in the same region, there is no direct evidence. Among the obvious places are En Shemesh, the Eye or Spring of Shemesh, and the waters of En Shemesh, Timneth-heres, a town in the hill country of Ephraim (also Timnath-serah), har-heres or hill of the sun, and, further afield, an ascent of heres in Transjordan (mistranslated as “when the sun comes up”).

An unusual Hebrew verb is used only in *Numbers* 25:4 and in *2 Samuel* 21:6. In the *Septuagint*, the *2 Samuel* passage is translated with a word derived from the Greek word “helios”, meaning the sun. In the *Numbers* passage it is mentioned in the context of the sun.

Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto Yehouah in Gibeah of Saul, whom Yehouah did choose.

*2 Samuel* 21:6

The people making the request to David were the Gibeonites whom the scriptures are anxious to discount as Israelites. The Gibeonites are called sojourners, “gerim”, or foreigners, “nokrim”. They turn out to be sun worshippers. Are these sun worshippers native Persians? Gibeon is associated with the sun in the famous



passage in Joshua when the sun stood still:

Then spake Joshua to Yehouah in the day when Yehouah delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel:

Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Aijalon.  
And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies.

Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that Yehouah hearkened unto the voice of a man: for Yehouah fought for Israel.

*Joshua 10:12-14*

The poetic couplet (12b-13a) is widely accepted as being from a different context. Joshua addresses Yehouah but appeals to the sun and the moon—to Shemesh and Yareah! Apologists say that Yehouah commands the sun and the moon, but in the text it is unquestionably Joshua. As if to confirm it, the text adds that Yehouah listened “to the voice of a man”. The interpretation says the listening and fighting were done by Yehouah, and only the sun responded but the couplet says it was the sun and the moon. It suggests that Shemesh was understood as Yehouah, and perhaps Yareah too, since Yehouah was of Hosts—until the redactors got to work! Job swears that he has never been seduced into betraying God on high by admiring the sun or the moon.

If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.

*Job 31:26*

All very well, but Job admits to us that it was done. The gesture of apparently blowing a kiss to the celestial object seems to have been captured on some pictures, notably some graffiti from Kuntillet Ajrud. The passage shows that the author knew there was a distinction between the celestial bodies and Yehouah but other people did not appreciate it. They therefore saw God as the host of heaven.

Saul had attempted genocide on the Gibeonites and they sought revenge on his sons, for which David gave his permission. The vengeance, rarely observed upon by Christians, is that the seven sons of Saul were *crucified* at the start of the barley harvest, otherwise known as Passover!

And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before Yehouah: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest.

*2 Samuel 21:9*

The word for “hanging” is “hoqia”, the extremely rare verb associated with the sun! It is better translated as crucify! The seven victims were left exposed on a hill until it rained—implying the whole summer. The ritual started at the vernal equinox was completed at the autumnal equinox.



In *Numbers*, the same word appears in the same ritual used as a punishment for the apostate Israelite leaders that have “yoked themselves” to the Baal of Peor:

And Yehouah said to Moses, Take all the leaders of the people and hang them up to Yehouah before the sun, that the fierce anger of Yehouah may be turned away from Israel.

*Numbers 25:4*

So, here the victims are explicitly crucified “before the sun”, whereas in the 2 *Samuel* passage they are crucified before Yehouah in “Gibeah of Saul”. The passage in *Joshua* places the “sun... in Gibeon”.

The seven sons were hanged on a hill before Yehouah. A hill or mountain associated with the sun is the mysterious Har Heres (Mountain of the Sun), said to be in Aijalon (*Jg*1:35) where the moon goddess was too, and Gibeah also means a hill, a suitable place for solar or astral worship. Gibeon is a place name, now called El-jib, about five miles northwest of Jerusalem. It is low, elliptical hill standing alone in a high, fertile plain.

The suffix “-on” is said by Hebrew specialists to be a diminutive, so Gibeon would be “Little Hill”, but this looks more like a deliberate attempt to distract attention from the fact that “On” means the “City of the Sun”, a name given to centres of sun worship, the best known of which was Heliopolis in Egypt. Moreover, the Hebrew word meaning “strength” or specifically “virility” is represented by these consonants, an unsurprising connexion with solar fertility cults. So, these Gibeonites were members of a solar cult, indeed the solar cult from whom Solomon had instructions on how to worship the sun!

In Gibeon, Yehouah appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

*1 Kings 3:5*

Gibeon was the origin of the cult of the solar temple of Solomon. It was the most important “bamah” or high place of Israel:

And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.

*1 Kings 3:4*

The objective historian might think this was a good reason to look into it, but Gibeon is utterly neglected both by the authors of the Jewish scriptures and by modern scholars. Their motives are the same. They do not want to know! Indeed the authors of the scriptures seem to have been deliberately underplaying the role of Gibeon in times before the temple in Jerusalem became their central place of worship. The Jerusalem cult leaders were re-writing history.

### **The Tabernacle**

So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of Yehouah had made in the wilderness.

*2 Chronicles 1:3, cf 1 Chr 16:39-40;21:19*

The tabernacle was a tent, and, in this context, one used for worshipping a god peripatetically. The portable tent of meeting instituted by Moses in the wilderness was kept here at Gibeon but apparently not the Ark of the Covenant! In *Amos*, we read:

Ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves.

*Amos 5:26*

The prophet condemns the people to exile for their apostasy in the myth, but in reality the people were not, or were only apostatizing in retrospect. It was the Persians who told them they had been wicked to keep them obedient. They were simply following the habits of their own Canaanite culture. Plainly it involved portable temples in tents for the worship of Moloch and Chiun.

Moloch has been described as having the head of a bull, and a body containing seven burning lamps. Chiun is the Assyrian god, Kewan, identified with Saturn. Diodorus described an idol of the national god, “Cronos”, at Carthage used for the immolation of the infant sacrifices whose ashes were venerated in the Tophet. Since Carthage is a Phœnician colony, this Cronos seems the same god as Moloch. The Romans thought Cronos was Saturn, and, if this was Baal Hammon of Carthage, who was represented as an old man with ram’s horns and a scythe, he looks more like Chronos, Old Father Time! The Greeks themselves mixed up Kronos and Xronos, suggesting that they are merely variant spellings of the same god—the Persian Zurvan, Time!



Candelabrum from Carthage, dated to the sixth century BC, showing that the seven branched Menorah of the Jews was not peculiar to Judaism, and matching the description of Moloch

The word, “Moloch”, looks like a variant of Melek, meaning “king”, a title of the sun god—suns measure time, too. It might well be a deliberate alteration because the authors of the scriptures were fond of changing names that they considered shameful, like theophoric names in Baal which were changed to Bosheth, meaning “shame”. Moreover, the sacrifice of victims by burning is a practice commonly linked with sun gods, whose legends usually have pyres and fires in them, the sun god himself in his human guise often being incinerated, like Hercules. It does not seem unlikely that Moloch is Melkart, the god of the city of Tyre, whom the Romans saw as being Hercules, so presumably was a sun god, and the Carthaginians retained the Tophet long after the Persians had stopped the practice of immolating children in Phœnicia. Finally, we saw above that Saturn was the star of the sun god, just as Amos says.

The prophet issues his warnings that Yehouah will make the day into “darkness, and not light, even very dark, and no brightness in it”. This is a threat from a sun god. He adds,

Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them...

and no Jew or Christian ever stops to consider whether these burnt offerings might be the infants offered to Moloch for the Tophet. The Persians might have stopped the practice of burning children, but they themselves boiled their animal sacrifices, and roasting instead of boiling (1 Sam 2:13-15) was a serious crime for Eli's sons! The implication is that seething was the right practice, not burning. Burnt offerings cannot have been boiled, and either the reference is pre-Persian or it was a reversion to older practice after the Persian empire fell. It could therefore refer to burning children, as Canaanites did!

The replacement god, Yehouah, was modelled on Ahuramazda as Amos describes:

Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth...

Amos 5:8

This is a sun god all right but one who has power over the host of heaven—Ahuramazda, alias Yehouah. The regularity and normal predictability of the host of heaven, once astronomy had made sufficient observations, led them to be seen as archetypes of universal harmony—in Persian, “Arta” or “Asha”—order. This order was the ultimate divine sign. God was harmony, and extraordinary events which broke the harmony were seen as omens, whence the growth of astrology and horoscopy. Whether the Persians perfected the idea or whether they just happened to be world rulers when the Babylonian Magi perfected it, horoscopes are first noted in the Persian period. These arts were being introduced at the same time as the Jerusalem temple was being dedicated by Ezra, the Persian minister.

The *Gemara* says that the entrance to the tabernacle was oriented east to catch the rising sun. This was a practice of the Persians on the march. Each tent in their camps was oriented towards the east to receive the blessed light of Mithras as soon as it was dawn.

In front of the tabernacle was a bronze altar made by “Bezaleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur”. Each of these three names is concerned with light. Bezaleel means “the shadow of God”, Uri means “my light” or “my fire” and Hur means “light”, “fire” or “sun”. Biblicists simply write these details off as fictitious, showing they have no respect for God's word when it suits them to ignore it.

To digress briefly, the use of names like these in the bible are evidence of the solar nature of the Jewish religion at origin. Theophoric names incorporating the name of the Jewish god are not common but are there. Uriah and Uriyahu mean Yehouah is my light, my fire or my sun. Ner and Neriylahu mean respectively lamp or light and Yehouah is my light or my lamp. Yehozarah means Yehouah shines forth, dawns or has risen. Yizraiah means the same in the future tense. Sheraiah means Yehouah is dawn and Samson means the same as Shemesh, as does Shimsai, the name of the scribe who with Rehum wrote a letter to the Persian chancellery about the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (*Ezra* 4:8ff).

## The Temple

The temple of Solomon had a bronze altar immediately before the entrance to its inner building, matching the arrangement at Gibeon. *Ezekiel* 8:16 describes the sun worshippers in the temple standing outside this entrance and facing the sun in the east because they were worshipping it across the altar of bronze. A bronze altar, if highly polished, could itself be considered a solar symbol, being a dark but reflective yellow, and since the worshippers were required to face the temple, not face away from it, they would have seen the sun reflected on the front of the altar, giving the illusion that it shone from within the temple itself. In *Mishnah Sukkoth* 4:5, the altar itself was praised! Rabbi Eleazar even used the expression, “praise to Yehouah and to you, O Altar”. In the ceremony, a reading from *Psalms* 118:26-27 was also given, mentioning the altar.

The Chronicler justifies David building an altar at the threshing floor of Ornan (DH, Araunah), even though there was the traditional one at Gibeon. He is building an altar to replace the one at Gibeon, because David was utterly petrified about going there for fear of the sword of the angel of the Lord. This latter expression is Persian, and the implication seems to be here that the Persian colonists had decided to abandon the old bamahs and build a temple, though both were intended for the worship of sun gods. No mention is made of Gibeon in the Historian’s account (2 *Sam* 24:18-24).

Note how the owner of the threshing floor has his name spelled quite differently by the two authors. Yet Hebrew experts will quibble about spellings and meanings as if the Hebrews had an academy to define the language precisely. Their expertise matches their god—invisible. Plainly, “Or” equals “Arau” although it ought to have been “Aura”, and the ending seems likely to be “nnh” pertaining to “shining”. It is curiously reminiscent of Ahuramazda, the name of the Zoroastrian god, meaning “Shining Lord”.

The account of Solomon’s orders in his prayer dedicating the temple (1 *Kgs* 8:22-53) shows the nature of the new cult.

And Solomon stood before the altar of Yehouah, across from the assembly of Israel, and spread his hands toward the heavens; and said, Yehouah, God of Israel, there is no God like You in the heavens above or on the earth beneath...

1 *Kgs* 8:22-23

Your eyes are open toward this house night and day, toward the place of which You have said, My name shall be there; to listen to the prayer which Your servant prays toward this place. And You shall listen to the supplication of Your servant, and of Your people Israel when they shall pray toward this place; yea, You shall listen in Your dwelling-place, in Heaven; and You shall hear and shall forgive.

1 *Kgs* 8:29-30

Dus took it that scholars unequivocally accepted that the temple of Solomon was a sun temple. The scriptures themselves are clear that it only ceased to be in the reign of Josiah who removed the horses and chariots dedicated to the sun. Whenever this happened, it was not in the reign of Josiah (639-609 BC) but was much later. Josiah has been mythologised to push back in time the transcendence of Yehouah. The more fitting time for it to have happened is in the time of the Maccabees, 500 years later than Josiah!

In 1 *Kings* 8:22-53, Yehouah was originally equated with Shemesh. Solomon looks towards the sky to see his god whom no other god is like. “My name” in the second excerpt is simply an abbreviation of the name of the

sun god, Shemesh. It is a crude alteration of the promise of the sun god to be there in the temple and listen to prayers from His “dwelling-place, in Heaven”. A similar trick has been played with “Your name” in later verses. Thus we find this absurd construction in the literal translation:

...the house which I have built for Your name...

1 Kgs 8:44

Originally it read “Shemesh” not “Your name”. In the translations of the scriptures that everyone uses as their bible, “Shemesh” is dishonestly translated as “sun” when it is the name of the sun god. The proper name is contrived by the editors to look like a common noun simply by adding the definite article, though they missed it in a few places. The physical sun and its heat is “chammah”, and is always translated properly except in one place where it is translated as light! It is probably the villain, Haman—of the Purim legend called *Esther*—who ended up crucified.

Having completed the temple, Solomon was visited a second time by a grateful Yehouah “as He had appeared to him at Gibeon”. So there is no doubting the association of Yehouah with the solar cultists.

Possibly the line of Zadokite priests were the solar priesthood, the founder of the line Zadok being born at Gibeon, according to the Chronicler. Again the Deuteronomistic Historian seems to have suppressed the connexions. In the myth, Zadok is a descendent of the original Israelite priest Aaron, the brother of Moses. The Persians set up the Jewish temple state. The Persian high god was Ahura Mazda. The two brothers who founded Judaism were Aaron (Ahrwn) and Moses (Mesha). Just a silly coincidence?

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 2. How Persia Created Judaism**  
**The Communication of Israel**

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## **The ark**

In *1 Kings* 8, the legend of bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to the temple for its dedication is related. The context of these verses is that of the Ark being put in place beneath the wings of the cherubims in the Holy of Holies. Then a cloud filled the temple and the priests had to leave their duties while the glory of God filled the temple. Then Solomon spoke a prayer that parallels the sun in heaven with Yehouah in the temple. It suggests that the occasion was the transition from *al fresco* worship beneath the skies to enclosed worship within the temple.

The Ark was received into the temple in the seventh month, about mid-September just at the time of the autumn equinox. In Egyptian ritual mythology, according to Plutarch, a great festival marked the body of Osiris being placed in an ark in the month when the sun was in Scorpio—September. Osiris was the winter sun or the dark sun, the ruler of the underworld and therefore the dead. The winter sun was associated with the underworld because it was, of course, below the celestial equator, which marked off the upper hemisphere of life from the lower one of death—summer and winter. The occasion of Yehouah entering the Ark seems to have been an occasion for mourning, as it was for Osiris. The sun god was passing from the upper world of life into the lower world of death—he was dying at the autumn equinox, and rituals had to be enacted to make him revive in spring. Fortunately, the rituals worked because he always did! Osiris in Greece became Bacchus, and Pausanias says his image was found in an ark.

Earlier, the Ark of the Israelites had been kept in Shiloh, which oddly enough, is the ancient name of a star in the constellation of the Eagle, now the constellation of Scorpio. When it was moved from there, the Israelites supposedly lost a battle. This Ark was supposed to contain nothing more than the tablets that were inscribed with the commandments of God, but why was that a reason for forbidding everyone from looking in? The answer is that the power of the sun was supposed to have been kept in the box and would be released at the wrong time instantly killing the viewer and throwing the seasons into chaos. The legend had the effect of stopping people from looking in and finding the Ark empty, but just in case they did, they were killed anyway. An ark is also a boat, and the sun gods of Egypt and of Assyria were supposed to traverse the heavens each day in a boat.

The authors of the Jewish scriptures have again played down the importance of Gibeon. The Ark is allowed to have spent time in the city Kiriath-jearim, a Gibeonite city, also called Kiriath-Baal, but it is not allowed to have spent time in Gibeon. “Jearim” is always rendered as forests but can imply a place of meetings.

And the men of Kiriath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of Yehouah, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of Yehouah.

*1 Samuel 7:1*



Even so, the Ark was housed ( *1 Sam* 7:1; *2 Sam* 6:3) at “Bet Abinadab Baggiba”, translated as “the house of Abinadab in the hill”. “In the hill” could, of course, mean Gibeon. As for the supposed proper name Abinadab, “Abi” is “my father”, a likely solar reference, and “nadab” pertains to a “willing sacrifice!” In *2 Samuel* 6:3, “in the hill” becomes “gibeah”, which does not differ from Gibeon. The journey of the Ark to Beth Shemesh ( *1 Sam* 6:7-18) must have solar significance, Beth Shemesh being the House of the Sun God. Beth Shemesh has a great stone ( *1 Sam* 6:15,18) and the men of Beth Shemesh were sacrificing to Yehouah, but shortly afterwards 50,000 were killed for looking into the Ark! By coincidence, a great stone is mentioned also at Gibeon ( *2 Sam* 20:8). Phallic stones are often linked with fertility sun worship. Solomon stands before the Ark making offerings immediately after returning from Gibeon ( *1 Kgs* 3:15).

Then spake Solomon, Yehouah said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever.

*1 Kings* 8:12-13

This is the AV translation of a poetic fragment which can be reliably constructed from extant sources including the Hebrew underlying the same passage in the *Septuagint* ( *1 Kgs* 8:53):

Then Solomon said:  
“Shemesh, He placed in the heavens,  
But Yehouah Himself has decided to dwell in thick cloud;  
Surely I have built an exalted house for you,  
A place for you to dwell forever”.  
Lo is this not written in the Book of Jashar.

*1 Kings* 8:12-13

The reconstruction places the sun in parallel with Yehouah, just like *Joshua* 10:12-14, and even with the slight emendment, mentions the book of Jashar. H G May comes to something close to the proper conclusion that the distinction is between Shemesh, the summer sun god, and Yehouah, the winter sun god. It is the winter sun with its clouds, storms and rain that brings life to the parched land. So, the reader should realise that the growing season in that part of the world *is* winter, not summer as it is in northern climates. The first rains come at the autumn equinox from Tishri onwards, the main rains are around the winter solstice, and the rains peter out by the beginning of Nisan, the vernal equinox. Ploughing begins in Tishri and the first harvest of barley is reaped in Nisan, inviting the festival of unleavened bread for seven days, following the Passover.

No one religion in the ancient Near east can be studied in isolation.

John Marco Allegro

So, in passing, note that Yehouah Sabaoth is Enoi Saboi or Sabazius, the same as the Phrygian God. Sabazius was a barleycorn god, who was bewailed like Tammuz when he was cut down in the field. He was also identified with Cronus or Saturn, and with Dionysus in an aspect as a beer god rather than the more familiar wine god. It is this Dionysus that was celebrated along with Demeter at Eleusis. In early Greek vase paintings, Dionysus carries a winnowing fan, associating him with grain, not the grape bucket of later depictions. Dionysus is supposed to have visited Phrygia in his myth, and been initiated there by Rhea, who is Diana, the Great Mother. He also has the name Bromius which appears at Eleusis as Brimus, the boyhood Dionysus whom Demeter

makes immortal with fire. Saturn is the night time sun, equivalent to the dark sun or the winter sun which brings the rains. Cronus is surely to be identified with Chronus and so is a time god, the god of the sun in its yearly path through the heavens. That equates him with Lao, the eastern Mediterranean god of the four seasons—the year again. Yehouah Seboath is the meaning of the short form, Joseph.

Idoltrous priests had been appointed (2 Kgs 23:5) to burn incense in the high places of the towns of Judah to Baal, the sun, the moon and all the host of heaven. The second commandment was opposed to idolatry—worshipping what had been made by human hands, but the host of heaven had not been made by human hands. They had been made by God's hands. Baal means "Lord", and it is most likely that many of the instances of Baal worship condemned in the scriptures is actually Yehouah worship, but worship later considered improper by the Jerusalem cult. Thus Yehouah here is equated with Baal Zebul, the Exalted Lord who dwells in thick darkness. Yehouah is always translated as "Lord" by biblicists still!

Some might argue that Yehouah cannot have been the sun because, in the creation narrative as apparently here, He it is that puts the sun in the heavens. It does not work. All of the eastern religions have sun gods who are not the sun itself. The Indian religion has a whole zodiac of sun gods and several more besides but the sun, Surya, is distinct from them. The sun was a physical manifestation of the god, or was the chariot or the boat in which the god traversed the heavens on the lookout for injustice. In Egypt Ra was never mistaken for his disk. In both the Joshua poem and the one here, the word Shemesh has no article so is unequivocally the god not merely the sun.

The author of Solomon's prayer was aware that God was much greater than any temple:

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee;  
how much less this house that I have builded?

*1 Kings 8:27*

There is no contradiction in the theology that the priests accepted. The temple was heaven, or a ladder to it. Like the Ziggurats of Babylon, it was constructed on a rising plan, with the Holy of Holies at the apex. It was not such a steep pyramid as the Babylonian ones, but it was nevertheless built on several ascending levels. Yehouah was the God of the Hosts of Heaven, and Yehouah dwelt in the temple, but the temple aspired to be heaven, and reached towards it.

God was always more accessible in high places and revealed Himself on mountains, and the people were used to the idea. Here was a special high place. It was on a mountain, and stepped upwards towards the sky, and the sun god entered it over the top of a mountain. People who had been used to praying to god in the sky, had to get used to praying to Him in the temple, and its construction was meant to facilitate that. People within the temple courts were to face the Holy of Holies, and people outside the temple were to pray towards it just as Moslems still pray towards Mecca. The Essenes, it seems refused this idea and preferred still to pray directly to the sun, or perhaps they rejected the innovations at some schism, and returned to the earlier practice.

The Essenic concept of Yehouah was conspicuously tied in with solar reverence, if not worship. Josephus describes how the Essenes uttered no words before their dawn prayers urging the sun to rise. They also used a solar calendar that was probably the Persian one, or based on it. The Essenes must have regarded the sun

as Yehouah, or some acceptable aspect of Him. Josephus also explains the Essene habit of using a small spade they always carried to cover up their excrement “that they did not offend the rays of God”! Professor Morton Smith accepted this as a clear acknowledgement that Yehouah was the sun, and so His rays were holy. The *Temple Scroll* also describes a gilded staircase to the roof of the temple. The Essenes were contemporaries of Jesus, and it is scarcely possible to believe he was not one, although Christians contrive to do it. The Romans were certain the Christianity was a solar religion.

## **The Dedication of the Temple**

The temple was really dedicated in 417 BC, but in the myth the whole event has been set back in antiquity, half a millennium before, in the pretence that the real temple is the second temple. If it was, the first temple was not dedicated to Yehouah. The dedication took place in the month Ethanim, the seventh month—September to us. At one time, Ethanim had been the first month, showing that the religious year had begun in September. Now the civil year begins in September and the religious year begins in Nisan. Nisan is the month of the spring equinox and Tishri (Ethanim) is the month of the autumnal equinox. Nisan 1 was the “New Year of Kings” and reigns were reckoned from then. The Persians similarly had their two New Year celebrations at the time of the equinoxes, and similarly changed the occasions around. Nisan has the sign of the lamb not a ram, and even Maimonides accepts that the Pascal lamb is the lamb of the Persian zodiac.

The rabbis do not like to admit it openly though, and have invented a myth to explain the slaying of a lamb. It was that the Egyptians worshipped the sun in Aries as a Ram—the god Ammon—and the slaying of a sheep was a deliberate insult to the Egyptians and barrier to the Israelites worshipping a sheep god. Herodotus said that Ammon was a god with the head of a ram, and Alexander the Great was declared a god at the temple to Ammon at Siwa, and was thereafter depicted with a ram’s horns emerging from his tousled hair.

The rabbis’ point is that, through totemism, the worshippers of a sheep god would not sacrifice sheep, and would object to the practice. The same is said to have been the cause of the dissension between the priests of the Jewish temple at Elephantine on the Nile and the Egyptian priests of Khnum, another ram-headed god, but it is probably part of the same myth. By sacrificing lambs, the Israelites were cocking a snook at the Egyptians, and building a Chinese wall between them.

It is a nice story, but cannot be based on fact because the Egyptians certainly *did* sacrifice sheep. Herodotus and Strabo both admit it, but suggest that there were regional, and probably seasonal, variations in practices. That it was done anywhere in Egypt, though, shows that Egyptians were not generally offended by it, though there might have been times in the religious year when they would not do it. Perhaps they would not do it in the season of the zodiacal sign, Aries. Herodotus says, however, that each year at the festival of Jupiter Ammon, the sun in Aries, that the Egyptians actually *did* kill a ram. The occasion can hardly have been any other than the vernal equinox—the very time that the Jews were slaying a lamb!

Both Jews and Egyptians had a festival at the same time of the year, when the sun was in Aries, and both sacrificed a sheep. The Egyptians apparently also had the habit at this time of marking everything in red using something like henna as part of the ritual symbolism. The Jews had the same habit, justified as the marks of the sacrificed animal made on doors and windows to warn off a murderous angel sent to kill the new born children of native Egyptians.

What really happened must have been that the Persians wanted the natives of their temple state in Judah to reject their Egyptian cultural background. For much of recorded history, Canaan had been in the sphere of Egyptian influence, and for many centuries had been part of Greater Egypt. Egypt was, of course, a hugely powerful country in its own right, and the Persians were never able to digest it fully. It took the Greeks and Romans to do that.

The Egyptians had been rebelling for decades under prince Inaros, and after a period of quiescence had again rebelled at the start of the reign of Darius II. This was the time that the Jerusalem temple was dedicated by Ezra. Not many years later, Egypt was to get independence under prince Amyrtaios. Much of the reason for setting up the temple state was as a bulwark against the Egyptians, and the Persians naturally wanted the Jews to hate the Egyptians.

That is why anti-Egyptian myths were written to justify ancient equinoctial ceremonies. Henna came to signify Egyptian blood, and God's vengeance against the cruel Egyptians, and a ram became a lamb to follow the Persian zodiacal sign but appear as an insult to Ammon. This was all pro-Persian propaganda, but was doubtless elaborated and partly ameliorated 200 years later by the Ptolemies who wanted to depict the Jews as expatriate Egyptians, led by a man educated by the Egyptians and brought up as a royal prince in the Egyptian culture.

## Feast of Booths

And he brought me into the inner court of Yehouah's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of Yehouah, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of Yehouah, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east. Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.

*Ezekiel 8:16*

The prophet is shown worshippers with their backs to the temple, between the porch and the altar, worshipping the sun towards the east. The context is that of the glory of God making preparations and then leaving the temple towards the east that it had earlier entered from the east. Seven executioners were called to wreak vengeance on the apostate Jerusalemites—the seven spirits of the Persian god that became in Judaism the seven archangels, but originally were the seven planets. W Zimmerle, in his commentary on *Ezekiel*, sensibly took this passage to mean that some of Yehouah's worshippers understood Him to be associated with the sun, and the prophet was warning against it. Yehouah lived in the temple, a part of heaven on earth, and worshippers should adopt the practice of worshipping Him there, not in the sky.

T H Gaster and others have taken the ceremony to be equinoctial, at the autumn equinox. Gaster points to parallels in the Ugaritic legends, notably of Shaher (the god of the dawn sun) and Shalim (the god of the evening sun, the same name as Solomon), with the rites mentioned here in *Ezekiel*. A *Mishnah* tradition is that a solar

rite like this happened at the Feast of Booths which was in September.

*Tractate Sukkoth* 5:2-4 has the details of the festival. It begins with a festival of lights in which four huge wicks burnt while priests danced with torches before a merry throng of people. As dawn approached, two priests blew their horns at various places on their way to the east gate, where they turned west towards the temple and recapitulated to the assembly the practices of their “fathers”, who had prostrated themselves to the sun, as this passage describes. If the correction ceremony was held at the Feast of Booths, it stands to reason that the original error had been.

S Mowinckel saw the Feast of Booths as the new year festival when the Ark was led in procession and Yehouah was celebrated entering the temple. None of it applied to the Canaanite kingdom of Israel but it was introduced by the Persians when they established the temple state. Most of the older legends in the Jewish scriptures are merely retscripted for polemical and propaganda purposes by the Persian and post-Persian authors. A small amount, especially of poetic material, might be older having been considered suitable for retention from the Canaanite religion of Yehouah, and some materials have perhaps been brought from other sources at a later date even though the material itself was older—the Egyptian tale of the two brothers for example. The new year rituals however seem to be fairly direct adaptations from Persian and Babylonian precursors.

The date at the beginning of *Ezekiel* 8 is about September, signifying the autumn equinox, although the description of the women crying for Tammuz must have denoted June. Either the views given to the prophet are a portfolio of scenes from the temple year or the weeping for Tammuz had been transferred to weeping for Yehouah at the equinox.

The curious expression about holding branches to Yehouah’s nose suggests also the Festival of Booths when branches were waved. The pilgrims called out, “Save us we beseech thee, O Yehouah”. Branch waving is supposed to be a late tradition, but it all is in the sense that it is post-Persian.

Deciding exactly when these rituals happened is not possible, because no one knows the nature of the calendar used. Nearly all biblical scholars turn to Egypt for parallels, when for at least 50 years since the discoveries were made at Qumran, they should have been looking towards the east, to Persia, particularly the later empire when it was based on Babylon, as the scriptures almost unanimously presume, and perhaps for clues about earlier times to Assyria. The Essenes used a solar calendar that was probably Persian based and not Egyptian, because their form of Judaism has so many points of contact with Zoroastrianism, and was still strongly held at the time of Christ. So Zoroastrianism was certainly not a temporary fad. Persia had ceased to be the world leader 400 years before the crucifixion, but it still had a huge influence on this sect that plainly influenced the Christian god in his incarnation on earth.

While the original calendar was presumably the Persian solar one, at some stage, perhaps in the Greek period the luni-solar calendar was adopted, albeit evidently not by the Essenes. Doubtless, those occasions when the moon was full exactly at the equinox had been noted as special because the full moon would set just as the equinoctial sun appeared on the horizon. When the calendar became luni-solar they would have been more important still.

It can be taken as a measure of lateness of the editor’s alterations to the scriptures that they condemn the

worship of the “Host of Heaven”, especially in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 21:3-5). Yehouah is Yehouah Sebaoth or Yehouah of Hosts, and that is evidently acceptable, but not the hosts of heaven themselves. A stage must have arrived when the cult leadership wanted Yehouah divorced from His identity with the sun, moon and planets. The books were altered to reflect this, possibly as late as the Maccabees.

The inconsistency is illustrated in 2 *Kings* 23:12 where “altars” made by the “kings of Judah” are mentioned in the reign of good king Josiah, showing that good king Hezekiah must have tolerated Pagan practices on the roof of Ahaz’s Chamber. The palace of Ahaz had obviously survived until this time. Since the authors were keen to show the wickedness of bad king Manasseh, Manasseh cannot have been included because they would not have muted his crimes by adding them in with the kings of Judah, and he was listed separately. Altars on roofs are likely to be for worshipping celestial objects, the hosts of heaven. If that means Yehouah of Hosts, it necessarily includes the sun.

It begins to seem that the Holy of Holies was involved only rarely—in equinoctial rituals—but that, for the rest of the year, worship was conducted on the roofs. Hezekiah was also happy to accept a solar sign of the confidence Yehouah had in him allowing him to recover. The sign was given on the roof of Ahaz’s Chamber where the altars were. It was obviously a sun dial consisting of a step like pyramid or cone surrounded by a wall which cast a shadow on the steps. As the sun rose, the shadow stepped down the steps of the pyramid facing east, and then ascended the steps facing west as the sun sank to the horizon.

Manasseh worshipped the host of heaven (2 Kgs 21:3:5). 2 *Kings* 23:12 is the reflex of 2 *Kings* 21:3:5. Josiah pulls down the altars erected by Manasseh. Much of the history of Judah and Israel described in the scriptures is like this. It is making theological points of propaganda and not recording history as truth—the serial apostasy of the Israelites and their kings. Manasseh erected altars to the host of heaven but the removal of them does not mention who the altars were for. The reader has to be interested and dedicated enough to remember the passage two chapters earlier, or simply assume they were idolatrous as the authors intended. Why is venerating the host of heaven apostasy but venerating Yehouah of hosts not?

Eventually, the story has it that Josiah removed the horses dedicated to the sun, and burnt the chariots that had been at the entrance to the temple (2 Kgs 23:11). These sound like living horses and functioning chariots—images were unlikely to have been of wood and otherwise were unlikely to have been combustible. They must have been ritual or processional objects like the British coronation coach. The Persians had horses and chariots dedicated to their main deities with different colours and liveries. These chariots went before the Shahanshah’s armies when they were on the march. One was to Ahuramazda, and one to Mithras, and later one to Anahita was also introduced. Marduk also had processional chariots, and in Persian times he was identified with Ahuramazda and/or Mithras. The god of the Jerusalem temple was the same. The gods who always had chariots were sun gods! The passage says it was the “kings of Judah” who had given these chariots to the sun, again implicating the good king Hezekiah. Finally the reference here (2 Kgs 23:12) to two temple courts implies the Persian period temple.

The later part of the Deuteronomistic History seems to be an allegory of the reforms needed in the Persian, Hellenistic and Maccabean periods that took Yehouah worship more and more into aniconism and transcendence. It seems that the first redactors, who had reverted to a puritanical view of the original Persian introductions, wrote up Josiah as the ultimate reforming king, purging all images of Yehouah from the religion,



whereas earlier, Yehouah had been visualised, like Ahuramazda, as the “massy heavens”, and particularly, like Mithras, the sun.

Succoth in Transjordan is supposed to have nothing to do with the Feast of Booths, being so called because Jacob built booths there for his livestock (Gen 33:17) immediately following the journey to Esau. This might have been a priestly denigration of a rival site.

## Sun Worship in the Prophets

The five cities that Isaiah speaks of in Egypt (*Isa* 19:18) suggest that it was written knowing that there were five cities of Canaanites in Egypt, and so it was after the diaspora had started. We read that one will be called “Destruction”, but the *Septuagint* calls it “Righteousness” and the *Masoretic Text* calls it “The Sun!” “City of the Sun” is the reading found in an Isaiah scroll (*1QIsa<sup>a</sup>*) at Qumran. It would seem to mean On (Heliopolis), but once Yehouah is accepted as a divine sun to some at least of His worshippers, then the reference could have been to Leontopolis.

Josephus understood this verse to refer to the temple of Leontopolis, a rival temple to that at Jerusalem and therefore hated by the Jerusalem priesthood, whence their name of “Destruction”. “Destruction” is one of those instances like Molech and bosheth when the editors have deliberately given a shameful name to something they did not like, and the other two names from old sources suggest that the sun was equated with righteousness. A shameful name is senseless in the original context and can be immediately discarded. Elsewhere (*Isa* 1:26), Isaiah calls Jerusalem the “City of Righteousness”.

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of Yehouah is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but Yehouah shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

*Isaiah* 60:1-3

This is quite unmistakable solar imagery, indeed, imagery of the rising sun. Here appears again the word “zerah” translated here as “to rise”, but in other versions as “to dawn” and to “shine”. Yehouah is unmistakeably the sun! Even supposing it was intended purely metaphorically, it cannot be denied that the God of All was being compared with one of His creations, that solar imagery was seen as actually exalting Yehouah and was not considered idolatrous. Such imagery is replete in the Jewish scriptures, and is uniformly favourable. There could have been no problem with *describing* Yehouah as the sun but apparently there came to be a grave problem with *regarding* Yehouah as the sun. It is easier to think that Yehouah was for long equated with the sun, but at a late stage such equations were deemed idolatrous, and Yehouah became invisible except to those who were adept at seeing metaphorical light.

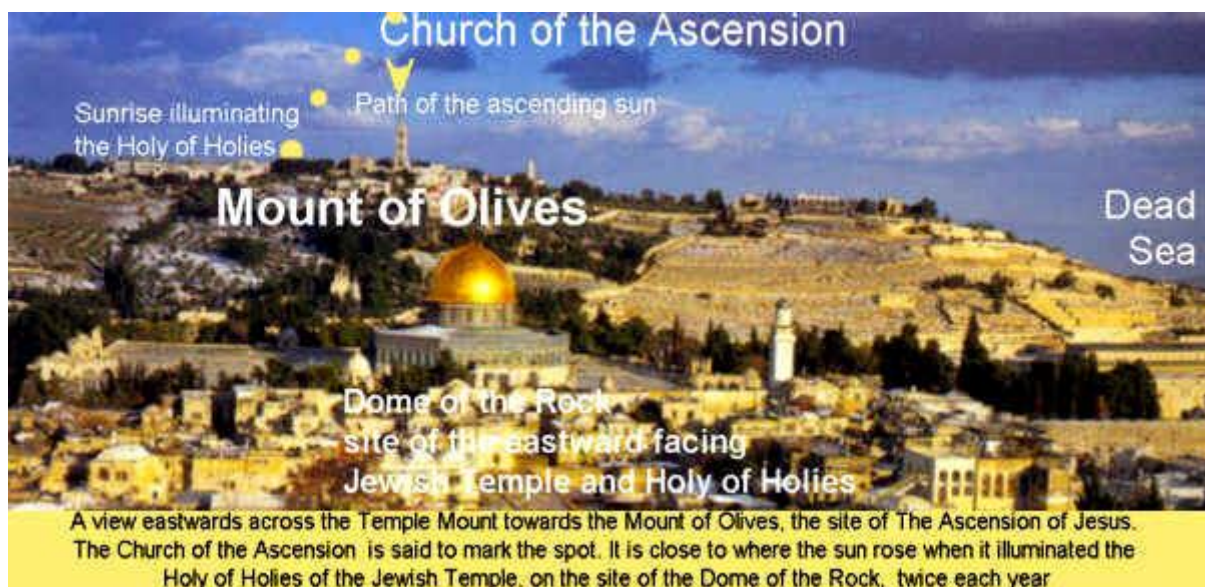
These verses actually sound as if they refer to the sun rising at one of the equinoxes, and they might have been taken from a new year liturgy. The dawn radiance of the sun illuminates the scene at the climax of this ceremony. J Morgenstern saw it as the dawn sun shining directly from its appearance over Olivet—the very place where Jesus ascended into heaven!—through the east gate and into the Holy of Holies, brightly illuminating the normally dark room. The Glory of God (Shekinah) had entered. The solar temple, designed fairly uniformly over the ancient Near East is now accepted as a womb—the womb of the earth. Its three parts were:

1. the Porch, the labia approaching the hymen which was the veil;
2. the Hall, the vagina;
3. the Holy of Holies, the uterus.

The solar penis had penetrated the vagina of the Daughter of Zion, Israel. Yehouah arrived from the east to enter the temple, consummating the marriage of the sun and Israel. There is no doubt that it is the sun who is the bridegroom:

He has set up a dwelling-place for the sun, and he comes forth like a bridegroom from his canopy. He rejoices like a hero to run a race; his going forth from the end of the heavens, and his orbit to their ends; and nothing is hidden from his heat.

*Psalms 19:4-6, Literal translation*



### **Equinoctial Sunrise over the Mount of Olives**

The Hebrew mystical concept called the Shekinah literally means the “indwelling”. It is the presence of Yehouah in the midst of Israel, and plainly refers to this sacred act of consummation. The equinoctial ceremony representing Yehouah impregnating Israel via the entering of His Shekinah into the Holy of Holies, was obviously a ritual fertility act, but it also allowed that the universal god could be localised, in a sense, in the Jerusalem temple. The earth is “eretz” and also means the land of Israel. This it is that Yehouah fertilises by entering the Holy of Holies.

Yehouah thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

*Zephaniah 3:17*

The Shekinah is a feminine concept and, dwells *only* in Israel according to the rabbis. It was originally a vaginal orgasm on a cosmic scale, but since the destruction of the temple (70 AD), it has been given many different meanings, essentially akin to the spirit of God.

The autumnal equinoctial entry of the dawn sun into the holy of holies was the symbolic union of the god and the land, after which the rains came. The people believed that the male's spermatazoa was analogous to the winter rains watering and thus fertilising the parched land. The woman's womb was barren like a dry field until it was watered by the male's life giving fluid making life grow in it. Rain was therefore considered the ejaculation of God fertilizing the earth. Men would go out into the fields to copulate with their wives to encourage the God's climax, a habit of some mid-Western farmers even in the Christian USA still.

Morgernstern thought the ceremony was used from 516 BC onwards, assuming the conventional date for the "return" of the "exiles". But no temple had been constructed at this early date, even if some colonists had arrived and had consecrated an altar or even a foundation stone. In short, there was no vagina of Israel until the temple was built and dedicated in 417 BC. Later in *Isaiah* (*Isa* 60:19-20), Yehouah is described as more than the sun or the moon, but an eternal sun and an eternal light. This shows that Yehoauh was a sun god in the mould of the other ANE examples like Mithras and Apollo. They were not merely the sun but the power or a light illuminating the heavenly lights.

I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests; And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by Yehouah, and that swear by Malcham; And them that are turned back from Yehouah; and those that have not sought Yehouah, nor enquired for him.

*Zephaniah 1:1*

In this passage from *Zephaniah*, the host of heaven is worshipped from the housetops, and God says He will cut them off, but among those being attacked are those who "swear by Yehouah". Now, it seems that worshipping Yehouah in certain ways was being forbidden. The word Malcham also appears, often rendered as Milcom, an Ammonite god, but better understood as "their king", meaning Yehouah, but a Yehouah understood in an erroneous way—as the sun? The notion is supported by the worshippers evidently turning their backs on Yehouah in the penultimate sentence. They were facing the sun with their backs to the temple, and in some technical sense therefore were not seeking Him or enquiring of Him. They were the people described in *Ezekiel*.

And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.

*Zechariah 14:4*

This is the chapter of the prophets so important in the foundation of Christianity—the prophecy that Jesus thought he would see happening when he kept vigil in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was forsaken! The imagery is obviously solar and Jesus gave up his vigil at dawn when the sun rose and the mount of Olives remained intact. Yehouah was supposed to have arrived from the east splitting the mount of Olives like a melon. Once the mountain was removed, the observer would have seen an essentially level plain to the Dead Sea and the horizon, right across the camps of the Essenes.

And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem

shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, Yehouah of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

*Zechariah 14:16*

So, this event happens at the Feast of Booths, the equinoctial celebration of the indwelling of Yehouah. The Persian New year celebration was a rehearsal of the eschaton when the new year fought and conquered the old, just as Marduk battled Tiamat.

But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

*Malachi 4:2*

The sun, Shemesh, and righteousness are explicitly related in an apparently theophoric name. Yehouah is Shemeshzedaqah. Not only that but this sun has wings, reminding us of the ubiquitous image in the ANE of the winged solar disc, particularly those unmistakeably showing the god or the king emerging from it, as in Assyria and Persia. The simpler solar disk without a figure is known in Judah, particularly in the post Persian period, as markers on jar handles and seal impressions. In many ways, the Jewish concept of “Righteousness” is the same as the Persian idea of “Arta”, namely harmony, truth and order—the “Logos” of the Greeks:

Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, Yehouah shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps.

*Psalms 85:11*

You shall hear in Heaven, and shall act, and shall judge Your servants, to declare the wicked to be wicked, to put his way on his head, and to declare the righteous to be righteous, to give him according to his righteousness.

*1 Kgs 8:32*

Here is the sun god as judge, the dispersement of justice being a function that sun god’s generally have because their rays are thought to touch everything just as the hands of the Aten did in Egypt. This is the sun of righteousness of Malachi.

J Tigay could find no evidence that Israelites ever worshipped foreign gods, seemingly a main concern of the prophets. The prophets were railing against those who did not worship Yehouah in the fashion prescribed by the Persian colonists. These apostates were the native Canaanites, worshipping Yehouah, most probably the Baal of the scriptures, in the way that they had been accustomed to over the centuries. Now that was wrong, and the Persian fashion was right. That was the propaganda message of the prophets. The Baal of the natives was depicted as an alien god but was none other than Yehouah worshipped in the traditional way.

## **Sun Worship in the Psalms**

For Yehouah Elohim is a sun and shield.

*Psalms 84:11*

The sun here is directly equated with Yehouah. In *Psalms* 19, the law of Yehouah is depicted with the attributes of an ANE sun god, as N Sarna has noted:

The law of Yehouah is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of Yehouah is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of Yehouah are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of Yehouah is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of Yehouah is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of Yehouah are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

*Psalms* 19:1

Since the thesis of these pages is that the Persians introduced the law only when Ezra dedicated the temple in 417 BC, it seems that the law of Moses is being identified with Ahuramazda, or perhaps Mithras. It adds to the suspicion that the “law of Moses” in Hebrew is a mishearing of Ahuramazda, and therefore that Moses is Mazda. In the first line, the host of heaven praise their creator, who is called El and translated as God, although “elohim” is normally considered to mean God. The central part of the psalm is the image of the bridegroom leaving his chamber noted above, and meaning the sun rather than its supposed creator. The “heat” (“chammah”) mentioned in verse 19:6 is commonly translated in the scriptures as the sun, so the verse could end as, “nothing is hidden from the sun”!

*Psalms* 104 has long been known to be part of the Egyptian *Hymn to Aten*, though the beginning sounds remarkably Persian in its metaphors and references to angels and fire. Aten parallels the roles of Yehouah in being the creator and sustainer of life. Aten is the sun, as the multiple allusion in the poem prove. What brings on the seasons, and what brings on the darkness when beasts roam?

The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens.

*Psalms* 104:22

Even in the very beginning of the bible, the allusions are to light. Darkness is upon the face of the earth, and “Let there be light!” is the first commandment uttered by God. The light was good and God separated the light from the darkness. Later, though, Elohim made lights in the heavens including the sun and the moon, so the author is distinguishing God from the heavenly host, including the sun. It again matches the ANE concept of a sun god who is not the sun itself, but the power of it or behind it.

## Theophanies

And he said, Yehouah came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.

*Deuteronomy* 33:2

This is called a difficult passage because the words “esh dath” translated “fiery law” are peculiar. The reason is that it is a Persian phrase, and Hebrew scholars are not interested in the Persian origins of their holy books and so refuse to learn Avestan, Old Persian or Sanscrit. The words really means something like “truthful decree”, and doubtless it is a reference to the law that Ezra was giving them, decreed by the shah. The familiar words



“zerah” meaning “to rise” or “to dawn” and “hopia” meaning to “shine forth”, often used in the scriptures in the context of the sun occur, again confirming the solar meaning.

Another passage that seems partly solar but largely storm is *Habakkuk* 3:3-15, which also has a god coming from mount Paran. Even F M Cross saw in these examples of theophanies, Baal, the Canaanite storm god, who is possibly the original Yehouah anyway—that is, the Yehouah whom the Persian colonists took to model into a type of Ahuramazda. Baal, which is a title not the god’s name, is a divine warrior, who, like Marduk, fights chaos in the form of Yam, “the waters”, and Mot, “death”. Both Baal and Yehouah are associated with thunder, lightnings and flood (*Ps* 29:3,10), and ride the clouds as here in *Habakkuk*.

Is it possible for a god to be a storm god and a sun god? P E Dion denies it, but how many examples does he want? In passages like these, Yehouah seems to be it. There are others, though. Baal Shamem, noted by Philo of Byblos, and Zeus Heliopolis at Baalbek, described by Macrobius, might fit the bill too. J G Taylor thinks that the solar aspects of these latter gods might have been a late development. Presumably he takes it that Yehouah was forever constant and had no late developments himself. The fact is that Yehouah, the God of the Jews, *is* a late development, certainly Persian, and the Persian books—Ezra and Nehemiah—are almost the last in the Jewish scriptures in terms of their own chronology (not that all of them were not substantially edited and even re-written later). Moreover, M S Smith has seen examples of joint solar and storm imagery applied to Assur—on a decorated Assyrian tile—and Marduk in the *Enuma Elish*. The significance is that the god is the winter sun—the sun of the season when thunder and lightning accompany the rains that fertilise the fields. Those are the storms that are admired in Him.

A fascinating theophany is that of Jacob (*Gen* 32:23-33) where the hero wrestles with a “man” until dawn when the “man” has to go and Jacob releases him for a blessing. There are many curiosities about the story which are pondered over in many midrashic interpretations, but they all need not be considered. Jacob is left alone but immediately is wrestling with the “ish” (man), and does so until the god Shamar (the Dawn) brings up when he sees “the face of God”. The author actually writes explicitly that “the sun (Shemesh) rose on him” as he passed Peniel (“the face of God”)<sup>19</sup>

The “ish” has to yield at dawn. Is the “ish” meant to be God, and he has to go so that the sun can rise? Is it the full moon, which necessarily has to go when the sun rises. This might be true in the sense that the moon is the night sun or dark sun that traverses the underworld in order to rise again at the next dawn. In any event, how can any such god wrestle and be overcome by a mere mortal? Not the modern concept of Yehouah! That is what embarrasses the rabbis.

Is the aetiological explanation why the people could not eat the thigh just an addition to the myth? The thigh is a euphemism for a penis. The word “naga” for “touch” can be read as much more violent an act, one more likely to leave Jacob limping, but at its worst would have ended the rest of the myth because there could never have been twelve tribes! Was this an early justification for circumcision?

Or does the whole episode have some significance in fertility terms? Was this “ish” originally an “ishshah”, a woman? Is she the personification of the earth and the wrestling match was originally a sexual act of fertilisation, necessarily suppressed by the patriarchal priesthood? It is possible, but the inky pens of the patriarchal editors



have blotted out the original. All that can be said is that some such tale would fit the ritual of the equinoxes. Might the original be sought in the Ugaritic myths?

After he has seen god, Jacob confronts Esau as being like the face of God, but Esau is the twin of Jacob, so Jacob must have been like the face of God too! These two twins begin to look like the summer sun and the winter sun, the harsh sun and the kind sun. Israel is soon to have twelve sons, the twelve constellations. Meanwhile Esau marches from Seir with 400 men to the north, rather as Yehouah came from Seir in *Deuteronomy* 33:2, also seemingly accompanied by attendants, thousands of saints. Esau seems to stand for the summer sun moving higher in the sky and rising further north each morning after the spring equinox and until the summer solstice.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

*Psalms 24:7*

References to the gates and eternal doors in this psalm, in Christian tradition and possibly the Talmud, mean the eastern gates of the temple, and so they must be if they are admitting the dawn sun. The eastern gates have had names like the "Sun Gate", the "Golden Gate" and the "Eternal Gate", reflecting the solar connotations of this psalm and the other passages discussed here. The King of Glory can only mean the sun and is identified with Yehouah of Hosts. We also find out in verse 24:6 that Jacob is the sun god too!

This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob.

*Psalms 24:6*

So, Jacob is the face of God. Dishonest translations often put this as "the face of the god of Jacob", but that just tells the story of the crooked nature of the religious professionals of Judaism and Christianity. They are not interested in the truth but what suits their scam.

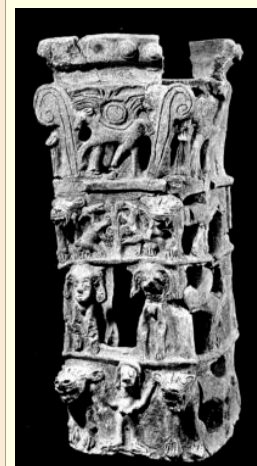
## **Archaeological Evidence**

### **A Cult Stand**

A tiered cultic stand has been found at Tell Taanach dated to the tenth century on the basis that it was covered by a destruction layer supposedly the result of Shishak's invasion. A storage jar was found with it containing grain but no opportunity seems to have been taken to take a C-14 reading. None is reported! The stand is also made of clay, presumably baked, offering other opportunities for dating but again no physical method seems to have been used. The cynic would guess that the dates would come out to be several hundred years lower than the ones assumed on the basis of damage putatively from Shishak's rampages.

The stand has four tiers. Tiers two and four have a tree of life and a naked woman respectively. Asherah was the Israelite goddess, usually associated with trees or trunks of wood, and she it is who is taken to be represented in these tiers. These tiers have lionesses flanking them, tending to confirm the identity of the goddess as Asherah because she had the title "Lion Lady", like Cybele.

Tier one, the top tier, has what seems like a crude prancing horse with a winged solar disk on its back. At the flanks are two griffins, a fabulous beast associated with sun gods like Horus, Helios and Apollo. The are also fertility symbols.



**Cult Stand from  
Tell Taanach.  
Height 53 cm**

Tier three is simply a blank space flanked by two cherubs. The modelling is not damaged here so nothing seems to be missing from the stand, and the space is intentional. The assumption is that here is the invisible god, Yehouah, and in tier one, is a plain representation of a sun god. If alternate tiers are meant to be the same deity as two and four seem to be, then the invisible god is equated with the sun god. There seems no reason to doubt this, though it seems most likely that the space was filled with a living flame in the form of a lamp, and if that was so, there should be traces of soot that would betray its former presence. No mention is made of this. *Psalms* 80:1 has:

Thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth.

It could almost have been a direct reference to the lamp in this recess. Since the stand is hollow, a lamp placed within it would give the whole object a flickering vitality. It would also have been a reasonable model of Yehouah being the light or power behind the sun, and not the sun itself.

The prohibition for Jews on depicting Yehouah in any form is based on Horeb where Yehouah had no form but spoke from the midst of fire. The implication was then that Yehouah did have form, that of a flame, though presumably because the flame constantly changed, it notionally had no form at all. The flame was sacred to the Persians, who are often wrongly called fire-worshippers. The seven branched lamp is part of the holy paraphernalia and theophoric names including lamps and light have been noted.

## **Disks and Scarabs**

Seals on jar handles marked "Imlk" and accompanied by a two winged solar disk or a four winged scarab have been dated to the time of Sennacherib, c 700 BC. About 100 years later they were replaced by rosettes with no "Imlk" inscription. The scarab is the dung beetle, a solar symbol in Egypt since ancient times.

The two winged solar disks are in the shape of the falcon images of Horus, and have a crudely shaped (triangular) head and a more precisely cut tail. They look like some of the depictions seen from Phoenicia, Assyria and Persia. Often Phoenician examples are more obviously bird-like, the body not being disk shaped, and even having what seem like legs, but these Palestinian examples are clearly disk shaped and have no legs, just the tail feathers, possibly standing for rays shining to earth.

Sir Alan Gardiner identified the symbol of Horus the Behdetite with Ra and with Egyptian royalty. The symbol stands for the king as an aspect of God. The seals stand for the sun in its morning phase (Ra-Horachty) when it arises from its night phase (Osiris, Atum) and before it enters its day phase (Ra). The morning sun defeats the dragon of night, and so was seen with attributes like Yehouah's as a warrior and protector. These qualities are transferred to the king through the use of this symbolic Ba (or fravashi) of the sun god. The Persian versions seemed to show the god in the image of the king. Yehouah was therefore signified by the solar disk, and the king was His son.

## **Solar Animals?**

Excavating Ophel in Jerusalem, Kathleen Kenyon discovered many baked clay figurines. Over 400 of 1300 found in a cave were human or animal figures. Again no physical measurements seem to have been reported to date them, but simple terracotta figurines are found all over Palestine. Some have said they are toys. One might be tempted to agree in the case of crudely fashioned clay horses, but crudely fashioned naked clay women either show these people were pornographers, or these figures are fertility goddesses.

Often the clay figures are broken, and this with their crude construction suggests they were made to be broken in some ritual. Indeed moulds have been found from which they could have been rapidly made. The horses sometimes have what seems to be a disk on their heads, and Kenyon took them to be models of the "Horses of the Sun". It is hard to be convinced by these supposed disks however, most being partial or possibly simply badly modelled manes or bridles.

Seal impressions of a bull with a sun disk between its horns have been found near Jerusalem. Seven seal impressions found in a stratum considered to be fifth century compared with similar Persian motifs found at Persepolis. The Persians were cattle herders and had the concept in their cosmogony of the Ox-soul which was a primaeval source of all life. The killing of the primaeval bull by the evil spirit introduced change to the static perfection of the original creation, so Persians were keen on oxen. There is a growing acceptance that Yehouah was a bull in His early depictions.

See also:

- ☐ [Sun Gods](#)
- ☐ [Mithras](#)
- ☐ [Joseph and Aseneth](#)
- ☐ [Brides of God](#)

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PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM  
**Book 2. How Persia Created Judaism**  
**Zoroastrian Influences on Judaism and Christianity (Part I)**  
**Pre-Zoroastrian Iranian Religion**

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## Introduction

Beyond all doubt, in Iran, hundreds of years before Christ died, a prophet arose whose life and teaching left an indelible but nowadays ignored impression. The Greeks saw him as a philosopher, mathematician, astrologer or magician, while Jews and Christians saw him as an heretical prophet and a magician. He was known in Greece as Zoroaster, a Graecization of the Iranian Zarathustra. Zoroaster's conception of God has interested modern biblical scholars because of the similarities between his teaching, and Judaism and Christianity. Some authorities deny claims that Zoroastrian ideas influenced Greek, Roman, and Jewish thought, but they are quite wrong—these claims cannot be disregarded by anyone who is interested in true history as opposed to the arrogant exclusivism of modern Zoroastrianists, Jews and Christians.

The Persian religion Zoroaster founded, and whose priests were called the Magi, has had an influence on the world which today is unrecognized. Zoroastrianism is the first revealed religion to have appeared on earth and so, if any dependency of one revealed religion on another is to be found, Zoroastrianism is to be the donor not the receiver. The Reverend Matthew Black, writing as long ago as the middle of the twentieth century could declare unequivocally in *Peake's Commentary*:

What we know as Judaism, as distinct from the ancient religion of Israel, is a post-exilic phenomenon.

Being "post-exilic" meant that it was indebted to the Persian Zoroastrian kings and administrators who provided for the Jews to "return" from exile. The Reverend Black was not the first to state this view. Lawrence H Mills was an American professor at Cambridge who translated much of the *Avesta* and published *Zarathustra, Philo, The Achaemenids and Israel*, in 1903 and *Our Own Religion in Ancient Persia* in 1913, both of which revealed the indebtedness of Judaism to Zoroaster and the Persians. Even further back, C W King writing in 1887 said that the Jews had their angels, the immortality of the soul, belief in a future life, the Last Judgement and the idea of rewards and punishments after death, "the latter carried on in a fiery lake", from the "Zoroastrian scheme". G F Moore in 1927 concluded:

Many scholars are convinced that this whole system of ideas was appropriated by the Jews from the Zoroastrians.

Is it worth asking why this should have been known well over a century ago but is still never taught in schools, in synagogues or in churches? A most prominent Christian scholar and cleric can tell us that many scholars know this but they are not willing to tell their flocks. We simple non-Christian types look on with incredulity. Surely these Christian scholars and gentlemen are irresponsibly but deliberately giving the wrong history of God's plan to their bleating lambs. Surely they must be worried that God will not forgive them for such a huge porky-pie when they get to the balmy place—perhaps they will not even get into a place with such a narrow gate

having such a huge blemish in their account. Doesn't that scare them?

Not a bit! They know quite well heaven and hell are baloney whether or not they come from Zoroastrianism, and are only for the consumption of idiots. If they thought otherwise, they would have cause for concern. They display none.

Some critics say that the Judaism was not indebted to Zoroastrianism, but that Zoroastrianism was indebted to Judaism. If true, all the more reason to ask why such a wonderful fact is not being trumpeted in the schools, churches and synagogues. What a religion is this Judaism, that it should take over and dominate the rulers and priesthood of the greatest empire yet known by the world? And that those who spread it were a tiny number of pious Jews held in captivity by a preceding vast and influential empire.

No Jew or Christian trumpets it because it is absurd, does not stand up to the facts, and once these were realized would draw too much attention to the real, non-revealed, origins of these modern religions themselves. Since the truth is that these religions depend upon Zoroastrianism, the priests and ministers, the scholars and rabbis of these religions central to our culture are neglecting their true origins, but it is safer for them to ignore Zoroastrianism—and Persian history—than to decry it or uphold it. So, they say nothing, hoping that eventually, out of neglect, it will go away.

Canon George Rawlinson, a Victorian authority on old cultures and religions, pretends that there is no debt at all, although Zoroastrian is pretty noble for Paganism. The religion of the ancient Medes and Persians was “of a more elevated character than is usual with races not enlightened by special revelation!” Though this is thoroughly arrogant and racist, there are few Jews or Christians who will disagree with the learned Canon. In his researches, Rawlinson probably had discovered the same truth that people like Mills had discovered but dare not speak it. You can read it here in these pages. Black is undoubtedly correct—Judaism is indebted to Persian religion.

It is time that the real influence of Zoroaster was recognized and properly researched. The problem is to decide what was Zoroaster's original teaching. This has two aspects, how to distinguish between the reforms of Zoroaster and the religion of the Iranian tribes beforehand; how to distinguish the religion of Zoroaster from the religion set down in the Zoroastrian books we now have, like the *Avesta*. These issues are not fully resolved, but enough is known with enough confidence to embarrass both Christian and Jewish religious bigots. The Jewish religion—and therefore the Christian and Islamic religions—has its roots in the Persian conquerors who set it up to justify their position as kings of the world.

## **The Background of the Aryans**

Iran is the ancient name of Persia, and it is derived from the root “Arya” or Aryan, the Indo-European branch of peoples who settled in that land. From the lost “seedland of the Aryans”, the Indo-Europeans moved to upper India, Iran, Russia and the nations of Europe such as Greece, Italy, Germany, France, Scandinavia, England, Scotland and Ireland. Sanskrit, Latin, Avestan are all sister languages, and the present day upper Indian, Persian and European languages are related. Baradar in Persian is Brata in Sanskrit and is Brother in English. “Persian” is a late European term for the “Farsi” language of Iran.

The kings of ancient Iran were very proud to call themselves Aryans—their rock edicts proving it: “I am an Aryan, the son of an Aryan”. The word Aryan occurs time and again in the ancient scriptures of the Aryans. Nothing is known about the beliefs of the conquered people but they will have formed a servile peasantry, just as the Saxons did for the Normans, and the Aryans were a minority ruling class.

The various tribes of Persia were, like the Aryans that had gone before them into India, nature worshippers, worshipping a pantheon of lesser gods and spirits, Daevas (Divas) and Ahuras. As a tradition of pastoral culture, it was natural that Iranians worshipped the heavens. God spread above their heads from one horizon to the other, dressed in his heavenly cloak, and, like the heavens, all Iranian gods could not be confined to “houses” but covered the whole world. Iranians had no built temples and no images, worshipping in the open.

Stone age society identified the sky with stone, the substance used by men and warriors to make their weapons, but then metals arrived on the scene superior to stone. The priests had to find an answer and it was that the sky was made of a particular stone—crystal, which appeared in veins in rocks just like gold and metallic ores. Crystal was therefore the same as stone and metal unifying the two. At the end of time the metal of the cosmos would melt engulfing everything destroying it unless it is righteous.

When the Iranian warriors established themselves as a nobility, they sought a distinctive and superior god of their own, not suitable for ordinary herdsmen and farmers. They decided it was wholly appropriate that the shining (deva) sky of bronze was the god of warriors, and the earth the goddess of peasants—and women. Spenta Aramaiti is the protectress of the earth and of women: “This earth then, we worship her who bears us, and women (Y 38:1)”. Her consort is Khshathra Vairyu, Desirable kingdom, Lord of the Sky. Here is the basic dichotomy of patriarchal religions: Khshathra, Sky, Kingdom (power and authority), Man—Aramaiti, Earth, Devotion, Woman.

So, the Aryans were worshippers of a Father Heaven and a Mother Earth among a variety of nature gods and goddesses. Those that shine and were immortal (amesha) were the heavenly bodies, and in the old Aryan background, these were gods, whence deus, zeus and theus, daevas and devils. The earlier Aryan invasion of the Greeks brought the father god, Dyaus (Zeus) Pita or Jupiter and his sister, a mother god with a name of similar structure, who became Demeter. She might also have had, in Persian, a name like Ahura Mata that simplified to Aramaiti.

The Persian god of heaven was called Ahuramazda (that the Greeks called the god, Oromazdes and the Pahlavis later called him Ormuzd shows that the “h” was scarcely pronounced), and this was the name of God in the *Avesta* as revealed by the ancient prophet Zoroaster, centuries before Christ.

## **Aryan Native Religion**

The origin of “Ahura Mazda” is obscure. The many Vedic Asuras (Iranian, Ahuras) were “Lords”, even so long ago, the title of the gods, but were restricted to three in the Iranian religion. Only Ahuramazda, Mithras and Apam Napat, the Son of the Waters, were ahuras in the *Avesta*. In the *Rig-Veda*, an “asura” was a powerful and potentially frightening god, and they became devils in Indian tradition, but the power was placed before the fear in the Zoroastrian reform. Ahuramazda was an Ahura, Ahura Mazda, and he was declared the Most Powerful God, the single true God above all others. The Persians always wrote the name of the god as one



word but Zoroaster would use the words separately and in no fixed order, evidence that his works were genuinely earlier because the name had not become stereotyped.

In Babylonia, about 1760 BC, the Kassites who conquered the land from western Iran, had a god written down as “Suriias”—the Indo-Iranian, Suryas. Clay tablets from about 1400 BC Egypt testify to gods with Iranian names in Syria and Palestine, and plainly enough, Syria and Assyria contain the name, Surya, itself, “sura” being a common adjective in Persian scriptures meaning “strong” or “mighty”, evidently derived from the word “surya”. The *Vedas*, scriptures written by the Indo-Europeans that migrated to India, know an indistinct god called “The Asura” but otherwise the high gods were Varuna, Mithras and Indra. The job of pre-Zoroastrian Iranian gods like Varuna and Mithras was to uphold “Arta”, (Persian, Asha, Vedic, Rita) the principle of truth, justice, righteousness and order, but Indra was an amoral adventurer who granted arbitrary favours not rewards for “Arta”. The word, “Arta” can be seen in the names of Medes mentioned on Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions in the ninth century BC. The mention of a god Assara Mazas in the eighth century Assyrian tablets must be Ahuramazda, and probably is “The Ahura” of the *Vedas*.

Later, Mazda appears as “Masdayasna” in scripts, and in theophoric names in Assyrian, Elamite and Aramaic texts. The original high gods seem to disappear and are replaced by the single god Ahuramazda. Mithras later made a comeback but Varuna disappeared unless he was an entity called The Baga (the God), a name of Varuna in the *Vedas*, and Indra disappeared because he was the chief of the daevas, the immoral gods hated by Zoroaster.

Oddly, the Zoroastrian yazata of waters, Apam Napat, was also called the “High Lord”, suggesting that he had been Varuna, the link between water and the sun being that the sun sets into the sea (doubtless the Caspian Sea for the Aryans) to become Varuna, the god in charge of the subterranean ocean. Or, the important water qualities of Varuna were assigned to Apam Napat when Varuna disappeared.

In treaty forms found at Boghazkoy in Turkey, four gods, Mithra, Varuna, Indra and Nasatyas are invoked as witnesses. These are either Indo-Iranian or proto-Indian gods, the Indians therefore appearing west of Iran at a fairly early date. Assyrian records suggest that the route to the east of the plateau into India was well trodden by 700 BC, to judge by the preponderance of Aryans names, but so many names did not appear in the west.

Avestan “Mithra” was a “covenant” or “contract”, (Vedic, Mitra = “friend”). In Persian, the same word became “mihr”, meaning “loving kindness” or “friendship”, and a title of the god Mithras was “The Friend”. Mithras is the purveyor of Arta—order, truth and harmony. Arguably, Mithras began as a guardian spirit of contracts, but must quickly have become associated with the sun because the sun always was considered to see all wrongdoing from its vantage point in the sky. So he became the aspect of the sun god that guarded contracts, and as other sun gods disappeared from the scene he became the epitome of a sun god. Mithras is recognized as the Judge (Yt 10:81,92), a warrior in a chariot, drawn by white horses, that casts no shadow (Yt 10:68; 102; 125; 136), and had a thousand perceptions and ten thousand eyes (Yt 107;82), all features of solar gods.

Some of the Yashts suggest that Mithras was the god of the space between the heavens and the earth (Yt 10:44:75).

His place is the width of the earth.

He looks upon all that is between earth and heaven.

He holds embraced heaven with his greatness, earth with his glory.

It is, of course, the sun that does these things, “his glory” being the light and warmth spread by his benign rays. And, in *Yasht* 10:127, Mithras is accompanied by a wild boar, syncretism with Attis, or the source of Attis being linked with a boar, Attis being a form of Tammuz.

Did Ahuramazda in Iran always stand for the dual deity Mitra-Varuna of the Vedas? The Vedic Mitra acts most often with his solar partner, Varuna. When he emerged from chaos, Varuna became the night-time sun and guardian therefore of the underworld and the cosmic ocean below. Varuna evolved into the chief god of the *Rig-Veda*, equalled only by Indra, both seen as universal gods. He was a fearful god in the Rig Veda but has the title the “All-Knowing Lord”, reminding us of Ahuramazda, and so gave wisdom to his devotees as knowledge of the cosmic order. Both Varuna and Mitra guard “Rita”. So, Varuna had frightening but also valuable qualities, and Mitra was the daylight sun with all its blessings, and justice.

They are so closely associated that they are invoked jointly with the single word, Mitravaruna, a regular grammatical construction that puts the shorter name first, whether it is the greater of the two or not. The name Mithrasoromasdes has been found even in the UK, on tessara at St Albans. Plutarch mentions Mesorromasdes (Misa-Ahuramazda). It is a variant of Misa-Ahura, a south western Iranian form of the archaic Iranian god, Mitra-Ahura. Such constructs usually stand for equal pairs like left and right, day and night, showing that Mitra and Varuna were once equal. The two equal aspects of the sun—night/day, winter/summer, rainy/dry. In several east Iranian languages, Auramazda appears (Urmaysda, Remazd) and means the sun.

In India, Varuna grew while Mitra declined, and eventually Varuna became “The Creator” and the God of waters, ruling his “kingdom”. The question is what happened to Varuna in Iran. A great god, clearly equal to Mithras disappears. Or does he? Was his name so sacred, it could not be uttered and he comes to be called only by his main title, “The All-Knowing Lord” or Ahura Mazda, or simply God (“Baga”)?

Baga appears in more Median names of the eighth and seventh centuries than any other god, is equally popular in Persian names and so too in Elamite cuneiform, suggesting that Varuna had become “The God” and had been identified as Ahuramazda, since it is the latter that appears on inscriptions. The explanation might be, of course, that the name of the high god, Varuna, could not be uttered—just as, in Judaism, Yehouah could not—so he was always referred to indirectly, by his honorific title, the “Wise Lord”, or simply as “The God”.

In the alternative view that Ahuramazda embodied both Mitra and Varuna—Mitra being the god of the morning sun and Varuna the god of the night-time sun. This deity is already a dual one, and so it is not far to Zoroaster seeing in it two contrasting gods. Because Zoroastrians worshipped in the morning, and never at night, when the evil spirits might be around, so in Iran, after a period obscured by the title Ahuramazda, Mithras emerged as the face of God, or Spenta Mainyu, while Varuna became Angra Mainyu and then Ahriman. Mitra was never separated from the pre-Zoroastrian Ahuramazda, and evidently only for a short time, if at all, from the post-Zoroastrian one. Mithras is first named, though, in Persia, in the inscription of Artaxerxes II (404-358).

So, Ahuramazda looks like the same god as Varuna of the “Vedas” or the dual god Mitravaruna. Varuna also looks to be the same word as the Greek Uranus, meaning “the Heavens” (Boyce denies this on philological

grounds, but they must be compelling technicalities because the words, their meaning and their provenance all yell out their identity), and as such must have been the equivalent of Ahuramazda. Like Varuna, Ahuramazda has a surrounding court of ministering spirits, but his goodness is manifest in nature—the ordinary realm of phenomena—the real world. Though people were rewarded or punished in the after life, Zoroaster was concerned with their behaviour here on earth.

The cult of the sun was a powerful one throughout the near east, and arguably all the great gods were sun gods in some of their aspects. “Hvar” (Hur) is “sun”, so the Hurrians, an earlier Indo-European tribe to invade the region of upper Mesopotamia, were associated with the sun. A prominent Babylonian god was Shamash, the Sun God, god of Justice and Righteousness—the Great Judge. Asura meant a sun god and all the Aryan chief gods were sun gods in some aspect or another. But the Iranian sun god was not a powerful god. He was Huar Khshaeta. Already Mithras and Varuna had taken on roles as moral gods, indeed might have been abstract moral gods who took on a solar aspect. Mithras was the god of covenants and contracts, while Varuna was a god of oaths and vows. Mithras was the rising sun, the sun of the pre-noon day, and Varuna was the setting sun, the sun of the night (and so the moon) when the sun was out of sight. Possibly the power of Shamash as a judge of righteousness influenced the Iranians in restoring the solar aspects of their moral gods, uniting them in Ahuramazda.

Akkadian gods were associated with a star. Shamash was associated with Ishtar, the goddess who was the Morning Star. Ishtar was a goddess in the mould of Kali, a goddess of love and of war. At some stage in the distant past, the evening and morning stars had not been recognized as the same and were given opposite attributes, even in respect of sexuality. The careful observations of the Chaldaean astronomers showed the planet was just one and they opted for it to be Ishtar, the morning star, but naturally it had to take the attributes of the evening star too. The ambivalent goddess was the outcome.

The Iranians identified their goddess Anahita (Greek, Anaitis) with Ishtar. Anahita was a goddess of rivers and waters, so suddenly obtained far more significance. Because of this transfer, Herodotus said that the goddess was adopted from the Assyrians and Arabians, but mysteriously he calls her Mithras. As a goddess of love, Ishtar was linked with Tammuz (Dumuzi) who was bewailed each year. An equal cult has been traced in the far north east of Iran in Sogdiana, where the goddess is called “Nana the Lady”, the name of a Babylonian goddess also with characteristics of Ishtar. Both had shrines at Erech within the temple of Anu, the sky god, and both were linked with Venus, but Nana was slightly the lesser goddess. The Iranians could not see the difference between them, calling both Anahita but using Nana as a familiar name for her.

In Babylonia, Nana was the consort of Nabu, a powerful god, the son of Marduk. He was a Babylonian Hermes, the god of messages, an intermediary who supervised the bringing of messages from the gods to earth. Note that a word in Hebrew for a prophet, who does the same job of transmitting messages from God is “nabi”. As a messenger, Nabu was also the god of writing and therefore of scribes. The Elamite scribes who kept Persian annals had the Babylonian god Nebu as their own god. The Persian for Nabu is “Tiri”. He became associated with Tishtrya, the Zoroastrian yazata of the star Sirius.

Vahu is the wind god, though he is not the wind itself, which is another god called Vata. Vahu is the “Breath of Life” but is also the last gasp on dying, so he is the god of life and death, of both the Good Creation and the Evil Creation. In this sense, of course, he is the creator of good and the creator of evil, rather like Yehouah. He is

the “All-conqueror”, a title of Indra in the *Vedas*, so he was a powerful god. He is also described as “pitiless”. Thus he has characteristics of a storm god and is associated with the space between heaven and earth, as might be expected of a wind god. Later, he was to become associated with Zurvan. More significantly, his name is part of the name of Darius—in Persian, Darayavahu.

## Aryan Legends

The Iranian *Vendidad* or the “Law to Fight against Evil” is one of the ancient scriptures of the Zoroastrians. The *Vendidad* actually describes the pre-Zoroastrian legends of the Golden Age of the Aryans in their ancient homeland when they were ruled by “Yima Khshaeta” (Jamshad). King Yima ruled wisely in a world in which there was no old age and death. From the weather described in the *Vedas*, the ancient Aryan home seems to have been in the Arctic regions, north of Russia.

In the pre-Zoroastrian legends, king Yima was judged to have sinned in some unknown way concerning a bull sacrifice, implying that the ancient Iranians had a bull sacrifice—not surprisingly. It continued into later times to judge by Mithraic iconography. Yima either had an unworthy thought or became arrogant and dedicated the sacrifice of the bull to himself as a god. So, he “sinned”, lost his immortality and died. Nevertheless, he remained a noble figure. The image is that of many of the heroes and kings of Israel and Judah. No matter what their merits, they always sinned at some stage.

In a later development of the tale, the king was told by the gods that the earth had become wicked and would be punished. He was instructed to build a “var” beneath the earth and, like Noah, populate it with pairs of animals. It is a Persian myth that draws upon the same Babylonian sources as Noah, and also links the Persian Yima with the Indian one. Despite their split with their Iranian brothers in the migration, the Indians remembered Yima, but he had transposed into “Yama Raja, lord of the underworld”.

From the evidence of both the *Vedas* and the most archaic *Avestan* texts, the continuance of life after death was something taken for granted as self-evident and not open to Question.

Mary Boyce

In India, the *Rig-Veda* implies a heavenly paradise for those who have been observant, but otherwise people at death dwelt in a joyless place beneath the earth.

## Zoroaster

Before anyone other than the Pharaoh Akhenaton, Zoroaster introduced a practical “monotheism” equivalent to that the Jews and Christians think is unique to them. “Zoroastrianism” is the name of the religion Zoroaster first devised sometime before the Persian king Cyrus the Great set up the Persian empire in the sixth century BC, perhaps, in the time when the Persians were still migrating south of the Caucasus towards their eventual homeland, between c 1000 BC and about 700 BC. Zoroastrianism was the original of all the truly universal religions, which Toynbee saw working in history.

The adjective “Magian” describes a group of related religions derived from the thoughts of the prophet Zoroaster. Mithraism and Judaism are forms of Zoroastrianism. Christianity is Mithraism applied to Judaism. Zoroastrian

priests, Magi, were present at the nativity of Jesus, and ascribed their coming to a prophet—the prophet was Zoroaster!

Some say Zoroaster is a myth. The works attributed to him are more than any single person could have written, and many of the stories of his life are obviously late and obviously mythical, but none of this means that there was no Zoroaster. Especially in these ancient times, great men always accumulated myths and some perhaps were even turned into gods, but all innovations have a founder, and the founder here was Zoroaster. Later embellishments by his followers were doubtless attributed to him until the corpus of his work became Herculean, yet Zoroaster remains at the core. He is not simply a mythical figure but a real historical person to whose name were attached the work of many later holy men, all of whom were possibly called Zoroaster as a title.

In the west, Zoroaster is the Magus, the founder of the Magian system. The date of Zoroaster's life is uncertain. Agathias remarks that it is no longer possible to determine with any certainty when he lived and legislated.

The Persians say that Zoroaster lived under Hystaspes, but do not make it clear whether by this name they mean the father of Darius or another Hystaspes. But, whatever may have been his date, he was their teacher and instructor in the Magian religion, modified their former religious customs, and introduced a variegated and composite belief.

No reference to him at all appears in the cuneiform inscriptions of the Persian kings, the Achaemenids, although they were undoubtedly devoted adherents of Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster is not mentioned by Herodotus in his sketch of the Medo-Persian religion. He occurs for the first time in a fragment of Xanthos of Lydia in 470 BC, and in the Alcibiades of Plato, who calls him the son of Oromazdes. Hermodorus and Hermippus of Smyrna date him 5000 years before the Trojan war, Xanthos 6000 years before Xerxes, Eudoxus and Aristotle 6000 years before the death of Plato. These are obviously misinterpretations of the mythical 12,000 year timescale of Zoroastrianism, which is divided into four quarters of 3000 years each.

The existence of Zoroaster even so is assured by the *Gathas*, teachings attributed to him in the Zoroastrian holy book, the *Avesta*. The *Avesta* is our principal source for the doctrine of Zoroaster. The thirteenth section, or *Spena Nash*, which was mainly a description of his life, has perished, while the biographies founded upon it in the seventh book of the *Dinkard* (ninth century AD), the *Shah-Nama*, and the *Zardusht-Nama* (thirteenth century AD), are legendary. The litanies of the *Yasna*, and the *Yashts*, refer to him as a personage belonging to the past. The *Vendidad* also merely gives accounts of the dialogues between Ahuramazda and Zoroaster.

The *Gathas* of Zoroaster claim to be his authentic utterances. The person we meet in these old hymns differs from the Zoroaster of the *Avesta*. Zoroaster displays emotions, doubt and despair in some of the *Gathas*, this being taken, like Jesus's emotions expressed in Mark's gospel, as a sign of authenticity. Here he is not a miraculous person of legend, but is simply a man, grounded in reality, but who trusts in God and the protection of his friends, for, at times, his position is precarious. Besides exterior opposition and the doubts of adherents, he has to deal with the inward misgivings of his own heart as to the truth and final victory of his cause. Hope, despondency, confidence, doubt and despair, a firm faith in the speedy coming of the kingdom of heaven, or the thought of fleeing—all these emotions find their expression in the *Gathas*. Yet they give no historical account of the life and teaching of their prophet. They are general admonitions, asseverations, solemn prophecies, sometimes directed to the faithful flock or to the princes, but generally cast in the form of dialogues with God

and the archangels, whom he repeatedly invokes as witnesses to his veracity. Moreover, they contain many allusions to personal events which later generations have forgotten. It must be remembered, too, that their extent is limited, and their meaning, moreover, frequently dubious or obscure.

The *Gathas* have elements in common with the *Vedas* of India which date to the start of the first millennium BC. The language of most of the *Gathas* differs from the language of the rest of the *Avesta*. It seems to be an archaic form of Avestan, and from this and the personal style it is written in, it seems to be the original musings of the prophet. Most of the rest of the *Avesta*, written in more normal Avestan, is probably the additional work of the later Zoroasters and Magi, as the religion evolved.

Avestan is like Latin and Hebrew, a holy language kept in sacred usage long after it had ceased to be used in daily communication. Indeed, it was dead long before the *Avesta*'s final recension in the time of the Sasanian king, Khusrau I (531-579 AD). Just as the Jewish scriptures were expanded in the commentaries of the *Talmud*, the *Avesta* required extensive commentaries written in Pahlavi. Much of the original Zoroastrian writing was destroyed by Alexander, and much of the restoration of it under the Parthians and the Sasanids was destroyed by the Moslems. Patriarchal religions are not deterred from Patricide!

## **The Person of the Prophet**

According to the *Avesta* (*Yasna* 9:17), Airyanem Vahu, on the river Darya, the old sacred country of the gods, was the home of Zoroaster, and the scene of his first appearance. Now, according to the Bundahish, Airan Vej was situated in the direction of Atropatene, and consequently Airyanem Vahu is for the most part identified with the district of Arran on the river Aras (Araxes), close by the north-western frontier of Media. Other traditions, however, make him a native of Ragha. According to *Yasna* 59:18, the Zarathushtrotema, or supreme head of the Zoroastrian priesthood, had at a later (Sassanian) time, his residence in Ragha. Shahrastani thinks his father was a man of Atropatene, while the mother was from Ragha.

In his home, he saw the celestial visions and conversed with the archangels and Ahuramazda as the *Gathas* relate. According to *Yasht* 5:105, he prayed that he might convert King Vishtaspa. He then appears to have quitted his native district, and after many dangers and difficulties, depicted in legend in the later books, he found in Vishtaspa, apparently a prince of east Iran (according to later legend, king of Bactria, probably a king of Chorasmia or Khwarezmia, south of the Aral Sea in Central Asia), the powerful protector and faithful disciple of the new religion he desired. He joins the pre-Zoroastrian world of Iran with the new era of Zoroaster. In the *Gathas*, he appears historical. In *Yasna* 53:2, he is spoken of as a pioneer of the doctrine revealed by Ahuramazda. Vishtaspa seems to be the archetypal pious Persian king.

King Vishtaspa does not help much with the historical date of Zoroaster. Vishtaspa does not seem to have any place in any historical chronology, and the *Gathas* give no hint on the subject. Vishtaspa was long thought to have been the historical Hystaspes, father of Darius I, but it then means the Avestan genealogy is utterly mythical, to no obvious purpose. No one in the court of Vishtaspa can be identified as historical unless king Vishtaspa is king Hystaspes, and queen Hutuosa is queen Atossa, but in history Atossa was associated with Cambyses and Darius, not Hystaspes.

The only secure historical evidence shows that Zoroaster began to propagate his religion at some time before



Cyrus the Great conquered Media in 550 BC. According to the *Arda Viraf* 1:2, Zoroaster taught about 300 years before Alexander the Great, but Assyrian inscriptions put him before then. Oleg Petrov, author of the [Temple of Zoroaster](#) website, tells us that, according to Zoroastrian tradition, he flourished in 588 BC, 258 years before Alexander, who conquered the Persians in 330 BC. Zoroaster is said to have converted Vishtaspa when he was 40 years old. If this is assumed to have been when he “flourished” then Zoroaster was born about 628 BC, and died about 551 BC, because tradition made him 77 years old when he died. Western scholars would date him much earlier on the basis of the *Gathas*, Mills thus judging them to be 900-700 BC. If Eduard Meyer (1908) is right, the name Mazdaka, a proper name of Medes in 715 BC, shows the Zoroastrian religion was already predominant in Media before then. Meyer, therefore, followed Dunker (*Geschichte des Altertums*) in dating Zoroaster at 1000 BC. Dr Mary Boyce dates him before 1000 BC on the basis of similarities in the *Gathas* to the *Vedas*, and the primitive pastoralism of them, suggesting that they were not written for a settled society. Whether this is going too early or not, Zoroaster belongs in the prehistory of Iran. Gautama, the Buddha, was born about 550 BC, Confucius about the same time and Lao Tse, if he lived at all, was about 600 BC, so Zoroaster predated all of these great thinkers.

If the late dates for Zoroaster are correct, the new religion, once launched, must have spread with the astonishing rapidity. It is more realistic to allow time enough for the religion to be significant by the time the Achaemenids took to it. The history of Persia and the Achaemenids before Cyrus is not well known, and nor is it that well known afterwards, considering the importance of the Persian conquest to the history of the world, but the evidence is clear that the Persian kings were Zoroastrians, and it seems safest to assume that some not too distant ancestor of Cyrus was converted. So Zoroaster will have lived at the latest around the eighth century BC.

“Zarathustra” seems to be a compound of “Zara” meaning “golden” because it is the bright quality of the sun (surya) and “Ushtra”, possibly adopted from Babylon (Ishtar) meaning star. To translate it as meaning “having many camels”, (ustra, camel) seems unlikely despite Zoroaster’s herdsman community, unless the whole is meant to be a pun. So Zarathustra is a *Golden Star*, or possibly, if Zara simply means sun, the *Star of the Sun*, or if Zara means spirit or deity, God of the stars or heavens. Mithras was the sun as justice, but Ahuramazda was the sun beyond the sun—the God of the Heavens—the power behind the Cosmos who wore heaven as his “massy cloke”. The *Star of the Sun* is the morning star that heralds the rising of the sun. Thus Zoroaster is the herald or prophet of God whether as Mithras or Ahuramazda.

According to Diogenes Laertius (*Pro* 6:8), the Magi claimed that ‘Zoroaster’ was the Greek translation of his Persian name. Zoroaster’s name meant ‘priest of the stars’ or ‘diviner by the stars’. In the Clementine *Recognitiones* (4:28), Zoroaster’s name is said to mean ‘living star,’ and in the *Homilies* (9-5), supposedly his correspondence with Jesus’s brother James authenticated by a letter from Peter, the name represents “the living influence of the star”. Diogenes Laertius (*Pro* 2:2) adds that some Magi who flourished before the time of Alexander the Great had the name Astrampsychos, ‘the living star’ or ‘incarnate star,’ perhaps another translation of ‘Zoroaster.’

Indeed, Zoroaster might be a word that came to mean a god-sent “prophet”. At Rhages there are hints at more than one Zoroaster, and he is sometimes referred to as the best or highest “Zoroaster”—Zarathustrotema. It implies an order of prophet-priests either in a hierarchy, or possibly a group of them at community level led by a Zarathustrotema. The priestly caste were called the Magi (equivalent to the Brahmins of India) whose leader

was considered a direct successor to Zoroaster.

The miraculous and the legendary are absent from the *Gathas*, Zoroaster being a thoroughly human and fully emotional man, making the *Gathas* quite acceptable to rationalists, but the legends that are written about him later get more and more biblical. In the *Vendidad*, as one of the original Nards, a book that precedes Alexander the Great's destruction of Persepolis, 331 years before Christ was born, Zoroaster was born of a virgin impregnated by a supreme god, who sent an emanation of himself ("khvarena") to fertilize her, just as Yehouah sent the Holy Ghost to cover the Virgin Mary. As soon as he emerged from his mother's body, he laughed loudly, showing that life is good and the material world is part of God's Good Creation, not a domain of wickedness. Zoroaster is tempted by Satan! He was threatened with death by a king as a baby, started his ministry at 30, was tempted, healed and taught. He championed the oppressed, lived an ascetic life, was persecuted and finally was murdered.

J Bidez & F Cumont say the Jews claimed that Zoroaster was a Jew and wrote in Hebrew. The story is that Zoroaster was an Israelite, whose true name was Baruch. He was born in the colony of the northern tribes which, according to the Jewish scriptures (2 Kgs 17:6,18:1), had been transported to Media. The Magi claimed to be a Median holy tribe. They insisted that their blood was transmitted through females hence their famous dogma of "xvaetvadatha" by which it was holy to have intercourse with a mother or sister. The original Jews of Yehud might have been Magi, but there is no clear evidence that the Magi were Jews.

He was born into a noble, possibly priestly, family the Spitama, the "White Ones" traditionally at Rhages (Ragha) in Media near Tehran, though truthfully further east. The people were settled stockholders troubled by nomads from the north-east, like the Persians themselves, who frequently raided and were therefore thought of as devils. Zoroaster grew up with a love of wisdom and righteousness but seems not to have been specially educated. According to tradition, Zoroaster remained at home until he was twenty, when he retired into a desert for ten years. One morning, when he was thirty, he went at dawn into a river to bathe and fetch fresh water for a cup of *haoma*, a sacred drink thought to have been an infusion of the mushroom *Amanita muscaria*. Emerging suitably purified from ritual lustrations, he had a vision of an angel in the form of a shining being called Vohu Manu (Good Purpose), an Amesha Spenta (archangel). Guided by Good Purpose, Zoroaster encountered a theophany of the supreme god, Ahuramazda, at the top of a mountain. Enthroned in glory and attended by the six Amesha Spentas, the agents by which He effects his commands, Ahura Mazda revealed to Zoroaster the True Religion and made him its prophet.

He answered God's call and returned with the truth he had to tell to the whole world, but his teachings aroused opposition from traditionalists. This is some 1200 years minimum before Mohammed, and 600 years minimum before Jesus, and is even before the Jewish "prophets", who only the most died-in-the-wool Jews and Christians now think are genuinely dated by their own works, because they are really pseudepigraphs written in the Persian period!

It will all sound familiar to any Jew or Christian because it is the framework of Moses's theophany with Yehouah, and ultimately of the Transfiguration and mission of Jesus. Christians will laugh at the name of the angel, saying it is like Bunyan in *Pilgrim's Progress*, but Bunyan did not dream up the practice. Jews know what most Christians do not, and that is that many scriptural names also illustrate some characteristic of their owner, though even Christians must know that *Jesus* means the *Saviour of God* just as his devotees claim him to be.

Saviours typically disdain women, but Zoroaster was an exception. Jesus was not an exception. He condemned sex and despised women, even his mother, whom he addresses curtly as “woman” and informs that he will have nothing to do with her. When Zoroaster had established himself at the court of King Vishtaspa, he married, eventually having three wives, of whom the third, Hvovi, was the daughter of the King’s Prime Minister.

Later tradition credits him with having married his seven sisters and the sister-daughter that his mother conceived by him. That was undoubtedly invented by the Magi to support their dogma of “xvaetvadatha”. The legitimacy of marriage between brother and sister has to be accepted by religions which teach that human beings descended from a primal couple. The myth of Adam and Eve must mean that Eve incestuously copulated with her sons, and her unmentioned daughters with her sons and husband. Zoroastrian theologians make the first pair of proper humans the twins, Masi and Masani. Women were created equal to males in the Zoroastrian religion, and not as an afterthought by a God with no forethought, proof, if any be needed, that the Hebrew God is not the Supreme God, who has forethought.

The Magi invented the doctrine of “xvaetvadatha” to justify marriages with sisters, mothers, and daughters by which they preserved their bloodline. It is this preservation of the bloodline that required the drastic action of Ezra in the Jewish bible, of dismissing the local wives that the initial colonists had taken on, and it is the same that causes Jews still to deplore marriages outside their faith, and to consider as jews only children of Jewish mothers.

When Zoroaster was engaged in coitus with Hvovi, waiting angels (fravashis) stole his semen and took it to Lake Kayansih, where 99,999 angels guard it until an unsuspecting virgin bathes in it and is impregnated. Her son is the new saviour, Zoroaster reincarnated—the Saoshyant. In the lake, the holy semen glows in the depths like three lamps. Saviours, as in Christianity, have a habit of being late, and theologians have then to revise their arcane theories. Zoroaster gives the impression, in the *Gathas*, he expected the Last Judgement in the near future, but it did not arrive on time. So, Magian theologians prophesied three sons for Zoroaster, by the semen of each lamp with successive bathing virgins, separated by millennia. Similarly, early Christians invented the millennium of *Revelation* when Jesus failed to appear on cue. As Zoroaster is the son of Ahuramazda, so will his third son become the last saviour, the “Saoshyant”, who will deliver the world from evil, resurrect the dead, preside at the Last Judgement, and “abolish space and time” to inaugurate an era of perfect, unchanging happiness for truthful people.

Zoroaster did not try to overthrow belief in the older polytheistic Iranian religion, but placed Ahuramazda at the centre of it as the most high god promising his desirable kingdom of immortality and bliss to the righteous. He described Heaven as a green place, a beautiful meadow or a Royal Park—in Persian, paradise. Zoroaster, like Christians, wanted to convert everyone—he even sent missionaries to India. The Christian scholar, James Hope Moulton has written:

Zoroaster taught nothing about God which a Christian would not endorse and much that a Christian should add.

But besides the promise of eternal life for the righteous, the religion of Zoroaster related to the everyday lives of the Iranian cattle and sheep rearing smallholders and peasants. Though they regarded the marauding nomads as devils, they had only recently settled themselves and many were probably still semi-nomadic but

grazing a fixed locality.

Zoroaster preached his revelation from God for ten years, encountering the persecutions and temptations that all subsequent saviours also had to endure. When he despaired or needed encouragement each of the six Amesha Spentas appeared to help him, but he failed to convert anyone. Then his cousin accepted his message. Accompanied by his first convert, Zoroaster continued to work fruitlessly for two more years. Finally, he was thrown in prison in Bactria and languished there until he had the chance to cure one of the king's horses. This king of Bactria, Vishtaspa (Greek, Hystaspes), is unknown to history but was so impressed that eventually he too accepted Zoroaster's message after two years of persuasion, and quaffing drafts of "haoma". Vishtaspa was converted to Zoroaster's teachings, and Zoroastrianism had the bridgehead it needed. Vistaspa, inspired by his new visions, offered his subjects the choice of being righteous or being dead, and they chose to be righteous. The prophet does not seem to have objected.

An historical Hystaspes was the father of the Persian King, Darius, and a governor of Parthia from about 550 BC, who worshipped Ahuramazda. He was probably a Zoroastrian, as was his father Cyrus, but it seems unlikely that this Hystaspes was the legendary one. Zoroastrianism seems already to have been a religion of the Medes in the time of the Assyrian king Sargon II, about 715 BC, implying either that Zoroaster lived earlier or that there were Zoroasters before Zoroaster!

If Hystaspes was not the legendary figure, at least the fact that he was called Hyspaspes—presumably after the legendary king of Chorasnia—is evidence that the earliest Achaemenids were Zoroastrian. But, if the Persian kings were Zoroastrian, the religion had already begun to decay from its highest initial ideals. They certainly revered Ahuramazda as the universal god but increasingly recognized "other gods".

From the Zoroastrian records, names associated with Zoroaster's mythology begin to appear in the royal line. Arsames, cousin of Cyrus I, called his son Vishtaspa presumably after Zoroaster's patron. It was a rare name among the Achaemenids but commoner in the east. Others appear including women's names. These names suggest that the Achaemenids were devout Zoroastrians by the sixth century BC. The Achaemenids might have been easterners who came west bringing their religion with them and married into the Persian nobility when they settled in Anshan. Equally, a Zoroaster from Rhages could have converted Vishtaspa, just as in the legend, but this Zoroaster was a late member of the line, while the one in the *Gathas* is his ancestor, or predecessor. This latter explanation would allow for Media always being considered as having a longer Zoroastrian tradition than Persia.

Scholars guess that Zoroastrianism barely existed in a pure form anywhere except in Zoroaster's writings. When the emerging nation of the Persians with their new religion, had their first victory over their fellow Iranians, the Medes, the well-established Median priesthood called the Magi were strengthened. The Achaemenid kings were keen to forge unity and interested in religion mainly for practical and political reasons.

Zoroastrianism was the national religion of Turania besides Persia, and spread to Armenia and Cappadocia, thence to the whole near east. It was the state religion of Persia under the Achaemenid kings when, before the Romans, they ruled the known civilized world, the Arsacid kings, the Indo-Scythian kings, and was revived by the Sassanid kings. In this revival it influenced the sect founded by Mani, the Manichaeans, Bogomiles and thence, the Albigensians.

The possibility of influence on the foundation of Buddhism and Chinese philosophies seems not to have been widely propagated, though Persian tradition has it that Zoroaster travelled both to India and China. In some passages in the *Gathas* Zoroaster calls himself the “One who Knows”, “Vaedamna” (cf Veda), a title that might be translated as “Buddha” or “Gnostic”. Even the name, *Avesta*, of the Zoroastrian bible means “Knowledge” from the verb “Veda” (past participle, “vista”), the same root as “Buddha”.

Zoroaster is also supposed to have travelled to Babylon, which is not unreasonable. Berossus, a priest of Bel-Marduk in Babylon in the reign of the Seleucid king, Antiochus II, about 250 BC, wrote a history of Babylon in which he claimed that Zoroaster founded a dynasty there in 2000 BC. Berossus was fitting his history into a fixed cycle just as the writers of the Jewish scriptures did. Berossus used a cycle of 36,000 years from the first man to the conquest by Alexander. Unfortunately there seems to be no relationship between the kings listed by Berossus and the king lists found on cuneiform tablets, so we must assume that Berossus did not really have any reliable sources for his histories. In any case, whatever he wrote has been destroyed in the Christian era, and all we now have are fragments preserved in Josephus and Eusebius containing this tradition.

He is also supposed to have gone to Anatolia, allowing for the possibility of an early influence on the Greek philosophy of the Ionians, like Thales of Miletus. An indirect influence seems certain. In 530 BC, the Greek philosopher, Xenophanes is telling us that there is a single apparently transcendental god. Pythagoras himself was said to have learnt from the Magi of Babylon, and the Neo-Pythagoreans’ doctrines of immortality and dualism owed much to Magian belief. The playwright, Aeschylus, takes for granted a belief in one supreme god. Plato mentions Zoroaster in *Alcibiades*, describing him as a son of Oromazdes—the God Ahuramazda (later called Ormuzd).

The apocryphal *Book of Tobit* seems to contain a lot of Magian allusions including the Holy City of Zoroastrianism, Rhages. In the story, the young Tobiah and the angel Raphael went on a trip to Rhages with Tobit’s dog. When they returned to Nineveh, the dog ran ahead, bringing the news of their return and “showed his joy by fawning and wagging his tail”. *Esther* is set in the court of the Persian king. There seem to be links between the Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria and Zoroastrianism. The Neo-Platonist leader, Appolonius, came from Tyana, a Cappadocian city where Persian influence was strong. Judaism and Gnosticism were indebted to Persian religion.

The *Dead Sea Scrolls* of the Qumran Community had an astonishing flavour of Persian religion, and from its Essene origins as well as the later influence of Mithraism so does Christianity. The appearance of the Wise Men of the East, considered to be Magi, in the gospel of Matthew offering gifts to the infant god seems to be a symbolic recognition that here was the Zoroastrian Saoshyant. It implies that the writer was aware of a link, and a need to demonstrate to others who might notice it that the Magians accepted it.

## The Persian Religion

The *Gathas* were written in a primitive society when herdsmen had to practice as warriors when called upon to do so. In the Zoroastrian *Gathas*, there is no mention of agriculture, seed sowing or harvesting, though these appear in the *Younger Avesta*. All of Zoroaster’s imagery is that of a cow herder. Even the *Younger Avesta* is ancient, being “younger” only linguistically, but is still full of ancient Pagan pre-Zoroastrian ideas. It was not as

revered as the *Gathas*. The *Gathas*, however, suggest a settled community! So, the pastoral imagery might have been a religious convention of the poetry and hymns. It seems the long tradition of pastoralism in the steppes had established conventions and these were preserved through the period of the move to the south. In the heroic Iranian Bronze Age, warriors separated as charioteers and joined local chiefs who were simply bandits. “Rathaester” is a chariot rider, and is a word that could be argued appeared in the name Zarathustra, before it was corrupted in a punning way—an ancient “Surya Raethester” morphs into Zarathustra. The impetus for the change could have been Zoroaster’s enemies sneering, “This charioteer of the sun is more a herder of many camels”. Guffaw!

The more primitive tribes, such as Zoroaster’s own, that lacked the technology for advanced weapons, were plagued by attacks from the raiding bandits, whom Zoroaster said preferred “the rule of tyrants and deceit rather than truth (GY 32:12)”. That the society of Zoroaster seemed settled might suggest he lived in a society of early migrants from the steppes, and had been among the first to settle, perhaps in Chorasmia. The misery and injustice of these times must have led Zoroaster to envisage a future time of justice and retribution to redress the evils of his own day. He became the first apocalypticist.

The various tribes of Persia were, like the Aryans that had gone before them into India, nature worshippers, worshipping a pantheon of lesser gods and spirits, called daevas. Some of the differences between the *Rig-Veda* and the ideas in the *Gathas* are typical of those introduced by religious reformers. Indian religion is, or was, notably sensual and *Yasna* 44:9 declares that the purification of religion from sensuality was a basis of Zoroaster’s mission. The *Gathas* mention no female deity sharing Ahuramazda’s rule. The religion of Zoroaster was markedly puritanical. Later religious reformers took their cues from Zoroaster.

Spirits in the *Rig-Veda* are “daevas” but in the reformed religion of Zoroaster, the “daevas” are devils. The way to put people off old gods when trying to introduce a new one is always to categorize them as devils. Zoroaster originally favoured one god, Ahura Mazda (Zoroaster used the words separately and in either order), so the others—often household gods depicted as idols, the teraphim of the scriptures and the Babylonians—were demonized and their priesthood denounced as idolators. Eventually daevas (devils) increased in numbers as their old identities were forgotten until there were millions of them, all manipulated by the Evil Spirit from hell.

Christianity made most of the old Pagan gods they met into devils. If that ploy eventually failed to put people off them, the bishops made them into Christian saints. Perhaps this is what the Magi did. A few daevas could not be demonized, they were too well regarded, and were retained as assistants to Ahuramazda, and eventually re-introducing as the much loved gods of the Indo-Europeans, but inferior to the Most High God, Ahuramazda. It seems Mithras was one such who emerged as an independent cult.



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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 2. How Persia Created Judaism

## Zoroastrian Influences on Judaism and Christianity (Part II)

### Zoroastrianism: Theology

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#### The Avesta

The tenth century Muslim historian, Masudi, says Zoroaster invented the writing of religion, his work, the *Nards*, being a book in 21 parts consisting of 2 million verses requiring 21,000 cow hides, more evidence perhaps that Zoroaster represented a prophetic tradition rather than just one person. The *Nards* were split into three categories of seven, one each for science, devotion and history. The science section was largely astronomical and astrological.

Avestan was the language of Iranian tribes to the east of Iran but west of the Indian frontier states. It was similar to the language spoken in Chorasmia until the 2nd century AD. The *Gathas* are judged to be about 200 years older than any other part of the *Avesta*, but both are entirely eastern with no allusions to western peoples like the Persians and Medes, or western customs or cities. If the Medes were introduced to Zoroastrianism by the merchants of Rhages in about 700 BC, then the ancient religious works were already fixed, so that the meeting with the great western tribes of Iranians did not impact on them. Zoroaster therefore lived no later than 900 BC. The *Avesta* is all that remains of the 21 *Nards*, and these were only part of an even larger collection of works that existed before Alexander destroyed the sacred texts of the Persians, as Diodorus, the historian, relates. The Zoroastrian bible was probably complete by about 400 BC. The Persian archives were held at Persepolis yet Alexander uncharacteristically burnt the city and murdered many of Persia's leading scholars, though they had willingly surrendered expecting mercy. The *Dinkard*, a ninth century Persian work says there were only ever two copies of Zoroaster's monumental work, one of which was burned and the other was confiscated by the Greeks.

Alexander was not normally disposed to offending the people he conquered. He had just captured Babylon where the priests of Marduk welcomed him, and he had showed respect to them, consulting them on the proper way to worship the Babylonian god, Marduk, taking him by the hand, and offering animal sacrifices to him. He ordered Marduk's statues and temples to be restored. Earlier he had honoured the Jewish god, and the God, Amun, in Egypt. Perhaps Alexander was merciful to those who surrendered without trouble but, after the battle of Issus, Darius was practically offering surrender to Alexander, so the brutality must have been in revenge for the Greek war with Xerxes.

The priests collected what remained of the burnt fragments, together with portions that had been copied for special devotional purposes and whatever could otherwise be remembered and, in the second century BC, Volosges (Valkash), one of the Arsacid kings, had the fragments preserved and sought to reconstruct the holy works. Evidently it was a long slow process because it was not finished until the Sassanids ruled in the third or fourth century AD. This also was savaged a few centuries later by the Moslems and the Tartars, so the *Avesta* is only scraps of a vast collection of Zoroastrian sacred work.

The only complete *Nard* extant is the *Vendidad*, one of the parts of the *Avesta*. The other books of the *Avesta* are either fragments of the lost *Nards* or precompiled extracts of them that survived the destruction. Fortunately Zoroaster's *Gathas*, being particularly sacred, seem to have existed in enough copies to have survived essentially unaltered.

The books of the *Avesta* are the *Yasna*, *Vispered*, *Vendidad*, *Yashts* and *Little Avesta*. The *Gathas* are universally considered to be the work of Zoroaster and are part of the *Yasna*. The relative age of the books is estimated by the purity of the grammar, the correct books—the *Gathas* and the poetic *Yashts*—being considered original. The language of the *Gathas* is archaic, though seven verses of them are in prose and are obviously not as old as the rest and must have been inserted at an early stage of editing. Their style and doctrine are later than the others. Ahuramazda is still the most high god, but the old nature deities have returned and prayers are offered to the Amesha Spentas, just as Christians, supposedly monotheistic as they claim, offer prayers to saints.

The *Yashts* are old hymns describing Persian sacred mythology. Possibly Vedic verses akin to the *Gathas* were in use by the Indo-European tribes that entered Iran in the first millennium and Zoroaster revised them about the time that the tribes settled, around the 9th or 8th century BC. Mary Boyce declares:

The fluidity of the oral tradition by which almost all Avestan hymns have been transmitted makes it impossible to date their subject matter at all clearly.

Yet, I Gershevitch from the *Avestan Hymns to Mithras*, considered among the most ancient in style of the Avestan hymns, thinks the conditions described in them are those of the mid-sixth century, the time of the rise of the Achaemenid kings.

The *Vendidad* is an account of the Zoroastrian dualist philosophy explaining the law and rituals needed to defeat Ahriman (Satan) and his demons in their plans. It is in the form of Ahuramazda's answers to the prophet's questions. It covers the rules of cleanliness in detail, explaining the puzzles of the Jewish impurity laws, though the striking difference is the honour awarded the dog, quite unlike the Jewish law. The *Vendidad* is plainly developed from the original teaching of the *Gathas* and Ahriman is the equal to all intents and purposes of Ahuramazda. Whatever Ahuramazda creates, Ahriman creates the negation of it.

James Darmesteter, who translated the *Zend-Avesta* says Persian religion has two ideas:

1. there is a law in nature
2. there is a war in nature.

The law in nature makes Ahuramazda the Wise Lord. The war in nature happens because Ahriman intrudes into the creation of Ahura with his wicked creations meant to oppose all that Ahuramazda does.

## **Zoroaster's Reforms**

The Aryan folk religion was polytheistic. In Hittite inscriptions Mitra, Varuna, and Indra, among others—are mentioned as gods of the Iranian Mitannians at the beginning of the fourteenth century BC. Zoroaster taught a

new religion, but it was rooted in the old Iranian or Aryan religion. He transformed Aryan folk belief to a consistent theory of the universe and a logical dualistic moral principle, but this dualism is a temporally limited dualism—an episode in the world—and is destined to end in the victory of Good over Evil. Zoroaster's teachings are of a high moral level. They were a great advance in civilization. Ethically, too, the new doctrine is on a higher plane. The existence of evil in the world is presupposed. Zoroaster created a supreme god of good, whom he called Ahura Mazda (Ahuramazda, Ormuzd), in his exalted majesty the figure of an ideal Oriental king, and a supreme god of evil, whom he called Angra Mainyu (Ahriman). Angra Mainyu is entirely Zoroaster's invention, and he made all the Vedic *daevas* into devils, the creations and servants of his one supreme god of evil. Ahura Mazda, in one reading of the *Gathas*, is the primeval spiritual being, the All-father, who existed before the world began, who made it, and who guides it with his power of forethought. His guidance is given by the Holy or Good Spirit, which is opposed by its twin. In the beginning, only these two great spirits existed, but they were antagonists from the first, each striving his utmost to destroy the other and all of the other's works. Each spirit created for himself subordinate generals and legions of supernatural troops to fight for him in the Cosmic War. Either of the two gods would be omnipotent if the other were conquered, and they and their vast armies are now locked in a desperate struggle for supremacy and mastery of the whole universe, a perpetual war between pure Good and pure Evil. But the Good Spirit soon had an encouraging partial victory, banishing the Evil Spirit (*Yasna* 45:2) to the Abyss where he is confined to organize his opposition as the principle of ill—the arch-devil—the equivalent of Satan.

Zoroaster does not explain in the *Gathas* the origin of two antagonists, but his reference to them as twins (*Y* 30:3) suggests that he thought of both as existing from the beginning of time, or as having been created together. Some read in the *Gathas*, that the Good Spirit of Mazda and the Evil Spirit, the two great opposing forces in the world, are both subject to a certain extent to Ahuramazda, so one explanation, also early, is that Ahuramazda, the Good God, inadvertently created the Evil God by having a moment of doubt.

The later Zurvanites represented the Holy Spirit as being identical with Ahuramazda. So, in the beginning, either the two spirits of good and evil (*Y* 30:3) already existed, or Ormazd and Ahriman are twin sons proceeding from the more fundamental principle, Zurvana Akarana (Limitless Time). Zurvana Akarana gave birth to the past, the evil spirit, and the future, the good spirit, whence the slogan, "Here Ormazd, there Ahriman". This might have been Zoroaster's original belief. Difficulties in translation and interpretation of a partly forgotten language might lead us to misread the *Gathas*.

Both spirits had power—the evil spirit had the power to corrode, corrupt and destroy, the good spirit had the power to generate, procreate and create. Ahuramazda is light and life, and creates all that is pure and good in the ethical world of law, order and truth. His antithesis is darkness, filth, death, and produces all that is evil in the world. Until then the two spirits had counterbalanced one another. As soon as the two separate spirits encounter one another, their creative activity and at the same time their permanent conflict begin. The history of this conflict is the history of the world—all creation divides itself into that which is Ahura's and that which is Ahriman's—though they leave it to be fought out by their respective creations and creatures which they sent into the field, including humanity.

Ahura Mazda is Zoroaster's invention, or the name is at least, though he was probably Varuna, embellished with the traits of other gods that Zoroaster thought were desirable ones. The oldest hymns in the *Rig-Veda* are the earliest expression of the primitive Indo-European religion, and are earlier than Zoroaster. In one hymn of

the *Rig-Veda* (4:42), Varuna and Indra define their respective spheres of authority, and the former represents himself as the deity of law and order, of what is morally right, and so resembles Ahura Mazda, while Indra, a god whom Zoroaster denounced by name, says he is the patron of the aristocracy and delights in war and poetry. Nevertheless, the two gods are friendly and not rivals. *Atharvaveda* 4:16, credits Varuna with knowing every man's inmost thoughts and with maintaining an army of invisible spirits who report on all the actions of men. In *Rig-Veda* 5:85, a worshipper begs Varuna to forgive his sins, if ever he sinned against someone he loved or wronged a brother, friend, comrade, neighbour, or even stranger. Varuna *does* boast that he is the greatest of the "asuras" and his will (law and order) is obeyed by other gods.

So, Varuna is one of the few gods who have the title "asura" in the *Vedas*, and he is a god of order. "Asura" is most frequently applied to three gods in the old Vedic hymns, Dyaus, Varuna, and Mitra. Dyaus is the Greek Zeus but fades out of the Indian pantheon in later times. Mitra likewise fades out, but appears in the later Zoroastrian cult as Mithras. Varuna continues to be worshipped in India as one of the Thirty-Three Gods and is assigned jurisdiction over the ocean, as the Hindu equivalent of Neptune, and is the Regent of the West, one of the four gods who preside over the four cardinal points of the compass and the foreign lands that lie on that bearing.

The most striking difference between Zoroaster's doctrine of God and the old religion of India lies in that, while in the *Avesta* the evil spirits are called "daeva", the Aryans of India, in common with the European branches of the Aryans, gave the name of "daeva" to their good spirits, the spirits of light. Another name of gods in the *Rig-Veda* is "asura". "Asura/daeva" were two races of gods, like the Scandinavian Aser and Vaner. "Asura" inspired reverence and awe, while "daeva" inspired a more vulgar, more sensuous, more anthropomorphic, more friendly thought of the familiar gods of light. In the later hymns of the *Rig-Veda* and the later Indian religion, the "asuras" are evil spirits, while in Iran the corresponding word "ahura" is the title of God as Lord. In India, the thought of "asura" had degenerated to that of the dreadful and the feared, but Zoroaster, while keeping a sense of transcendent awe, also kept the idea of goodness and truth. The daevas, however, he declared as malicious spirits and devils. Thus "ahura/daeva", "daeva/asura" in Zoroastrian and in later Brahman theology are opposite in their meanings.

So, Zoroaster damns all the "daevas", but makes an exception for the gods who are called "asuras" in the *Vedas*, since he calls his own god an "asura". "Asura" means "lord". One asura—originally Varuna in the Aryan pantheon—Zoroaster made the supreme god, conferring upon it the title of "the wise or illustrious" (*mazda*), and so, he called his good god Ahura Mazda, "Illustrious Lord", suggesting a sun god. In post-Vedic Sanskrit the word "asura" becomes the generic name of a race of supernatural beings who are the enemies of the Indian gods, although the gods who are called "asura" in the early *Vedas* never appear among the "asuras" of the later myths.

The daevas, still in the *Gathas* the gods of old popular belief, are the corrupted agents of Ahriman, causing all that is evil in the world—the idols of the people—the true enemies of mankind whose priests and votaries are to Zoroaster idolaters and heretics. Later, these become a multitude of harmful devils. The daevas are foes to cattle and to cattlebreeding, and friends to those who work ill to the cow. Idolaters slay the ox for sacrifice. To Zoroaster, this is an abomination, for the cow is a sacred animal, the gift of Ahuramazda to man, and to be protected. In an old confession of faith, the convert is pledged to abjure the theft and robbery of cattle and the ravaging of villages inhabited by worshippers of Mazda (Y 12:2). Here is a religion of the settled cowherd. The

daevas-cult is the religion of uncivilized marauding tribes.

Some daevas, though, retained a good role as an intermediary between the earthly and heavenly planes. Among them was the god of fire, deliberately kept by Zoroaster, and another power of light, Mitra, the god of day (Iranian, Mithra), who survived in popular belief to be reabsorbed into Zoroastrian religion as a yazata, angel. The *Gathas* excluded any cult of Mithra and had no use for the Haoma. Beside the Lord and his Fire, the *Gathas* only accepted archangels and some ministers of Ahuramazda, as aspects of the supreme Lord, who are personifications of abstract ideas. The essence of Ahuramazda is Truth and Law (asha, arta = Vedic, rita). Ahuramazda is the embodiment of these abstractions, much as the Christian God is seen as the personification of Love. The essence of the wicked spirit is falsehood, and falsehood, as the embodiment of the evil principle, is much more frequently mentioned in the *Gathas* than Ahriman himself.

Any Iranian gods that Zoroaster may have exempted from his general damnation of all other gods must have been created by Ahura Mazda or the archangels as spirits (*yazatas*) subordinate to the six and therefore subordinate to the supreme god. Ahuramazda was the power that transcended the heavens and regulated their motions, so that Mithras, a solar deity, is necessarily his son, and, as the sun moves between the earth and the vault of the sky, so was he the intermediary between mortals and his inaccessible Father. He had been born fully mature on earth with a miraculous nativity first witnessed by the shepherds who reappear in the Christian legend, and the Christians eventually selected the birthday of Mithras as the birthday of Jesus, the Semitic Mithras. As in Christianity, the Son replaced his aloof Father in practice producing the late derivative of Zoroastrianism that long competed with Christianity in the dying Roman Empire—Mithraism.

Ahuramazda is, according to the *Gathas*, the creator of heaven and earth, the material and spiritual worlds. He is the source of the alternation of light and darkness, the Lord of Light, and the very centre of nature, as well as the sovereign lawgiver, the originator of the moral order and judge of the entire world.

Ahura Mazda created six or seven (depending on whether the Holy Spirit is counted or not) archangels to help him in the war against Angra Mainya. They were personifications of abstract qualities that the later *Avesta* calls Amesha Spentas, “glorious immortals”. The idea of gods coming in sevens is ancient. In Canaan, there were seven storm gods called Baalim. An Akkadian text has seven Adads and so does an Assyrian text from Assur. In the Sumerian “Hymn to Iskur”, Enlil gives seven storm winds to Iskur.

Since Mazda was Varuna or Zeus, a sky god, Zoroaster is surely here personifying the colours of the rainbow, variously seen as six or seven. The names of the Amesha Spentas frequently recur throughout the *Gathas* and characterize Zoroaster’s thought and his concept of god. The six Amesha Spentas are:

1. Universal Order as reflected in Righteousness, Truth and Law (Asha Vahista; Aletheia). It is the genius of truth, the constant companion of Ahuramazda, Asha as Light and Flame, and effectively an aspect of God Himself, and the embodiment of all that is true, good and right, law and rule—all practically the same thing for Zoroaster. Since all these were qualities of Mithras, perhaps Asha was identified as Mithras even by Zoroastrians. Mithras was the sun and the sun always denotes Justice and Fairness because its light penetrates everywhere. Asha is found in Persian names as Arta, the older root.
2. The Good Thought or Principle (Vohu Mano; Eunioa) is at its simplest “Good Sense” the good principle, the idea of the good, the principle that works in man inclining him to what is good. And yet is what the

Christians would call “Grace” and the Jews “Lovingkindness” or “Piety”. It is the effect of Ahuramazda working within human beings—the result of people receiving God and living according to His wishes. It is a state of earthly paradise—experiencing God’s kingdom in life.

3. The Wished-for Power and Kingdom of God (Khshathra Vairya; Eunomia) is Ahuramazda’s original perfect kingdom of God that ultimately will be realized again when evil is defeated but meanwhile has been spoiled by the machinations of the Evil One.
4. Devotion, Reverence for the Divine or Holy Harmony (Aramaiti; Thopsia) is a female genius, thought of as a daughter of Ahuramazda who lived in the real world because she is the bond of unity between the righteous person and God, and also with all other humans who are brothers and sisters. Aramaiti means “Earth” and in the *Vedas* is Earth. She is identified by the Greeks as Demeter and in Armenia she is known as Spendaramet.
5. Perfection or Salvation (Haurvatat; Ploutos) and,
6. Immortality (Ameretat; Athanasia) are always considered together, and stand for the state of Ahuramazda’s original good creation, and therefore qualities to be had only by the righteous. Both are feminine.

Other angelic spirits in Mazdaism include:

- ❑ The Good Spirit (Spenta Mainyu) who makes up the seventh spirit. The Menorah, the Jewish seven branched candlestick, represents these six spirits, three on either side of Spenta Mainyu, exactly the way the Persian kings were represented on their tombs, with six attendants, three on either side of the king. The Jewish Star of David might have been another symbol of the six spirits, radiating from God, though it was never a symbol of Judaism until the Middle Ages.
- ❑ The Evil Spirit (Angra Mainyu), later called Ahriman.
- ❑ For Zoroaster, Falsehood or the Lie (Druj) is the manifestation of the Evil One in the world, the essence of evil, and appears more often in the *Gathas* than the name of the Evil Spirit. Since Zoroaster was reforming an earlier nature religion, the word *Druj* is possibly at root the same as the words *Druid* and *Dryad*. O.Schrader in his *Prehistoric Antiquities of the Aryan Peoples*, thinks the name had been applied to malevolent ghosts, conceivably the same nature spirits that the Druids were supposed to have guarded against. When Ahriman became the opponent of Ahuramazda, the Druj was equated with him.
- ❑ The Defender of Animals or Ox-soul (Geush Urvan) reflects Zoroastrianism’s concern for useful animals as well as mankind, a concern not yet implemented by Christianity and not even addressed for a thousand years until Francis of Assisi. There is no mention in the *Gathas* of sowing or reaping. The people were herders. Cattle were specially revered animals and remained so by the Persians, but they herded them for entirely practical reasons and the reverence merely meant they should not be ill-treated. In India the cow became unreasonably revered—it became sacred. Was this common element from the common origins of the Persians and Indians or did the Indians learn a reverence for cattle from Zoroaster’s missionaries and misunderstand and abuse it?
- ❑ Obedience and faithful hearing (Sraosha)

For Zoroaster, spirits and mankind are to obey the same laws. The good qualities could be had by the followers of Ahuramazda by their adherence to his commands. Holding up the Truth, Zoroaster thought the Lie would perish.



Persian kings considered they ruled by the favour of Ahuramazda, whose commands the king fulfilled, but he was not their only god. Herodotus says the Persians worship the sun (Mithras), moon (Mah), earth (Zam), fire (Atar), water (Apam Napat) and wind (Vahu), though the inscriptions of early Persian kings mention none of these other gods by name. Note that the last four Persian “gods” are the traditional elements of the Greek philosophers of the fifth century BC, when Herodotus wrote his histories. Did the Greek philosophers get these ideas from Persian religion? From the time of Artaxerxes II the gods Mithras and Anahita are mentioned on inscriptions.

Mithras which means “covenant” is the Vedic Mitra, a sun god who has little place in Zoroaster’s original scheme to judge from the *Gathas*, but evidently was restored under Artaxerxes. He was probably tolerated by Zoroaster as a good angel, having the qualities of Asha—Truth, Justice and Righteousness—but was later identified with Ahuramazda (the tenth *Yasht* says Ahuramazda and Mithras are gods of like power) and effectively replaced him in some cults, one of which emerged in the Roman sphere. Xenophon says Persian soldiers pitched their tents to face the morning sun so that, on waking, they could automatically follow Zoroastrian practice of praying first thing to the rising sun. The magi then offered sacrifices. Whether the Persians can be regarded as proper Zoroastrians is a moot point, but no one denies that they retained a great reverence for Truth and the quality of uncorruptible honesty transferred to Mithras and thence to the figure, also called Mithras, that became popular in the Roman empire. In view of the importance of Easter to Christians, it is curious that the days of the equinoxes were especially sacred to Mithras, Jesus taking one and the angel Michael the other.

The Goddess (Anahita; Aphrodite) is thought not to have had any place in the religious scheme of Zoroaster, because she does not appear in the *Gathas*, but was supposedly introduced later as one of the trinity of Ahuramazda, Mithras and Anahita the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II having prayers to this trinity. Xenophon says that Cyrus the Younger led his processions with three empty chariots for the gods, the second specifically for the sun and the third dressed in red finery. They seem to have been for Ahuramazda, Mithras and Anahita respectively, red being a warrior colour for the war goddess. Artaxerxes II actually calls upon all three of these gods in his inscriptions.

In the *Vedas*, Aryaman is the aspect of the sun responsible for sacrifices. Varuna and Mithras are responsible for universal order (Vedic, Rita; cf Arta or Asha) with Mithras the sun of the daytime, and Varuna the sun of the night (and therefore the moon), but both having ethical responsibilities too. They form a trinity whose mother is Aditi, a sun or sky goddess, but considered by most to be a later invention, although the name has echoes of Anahita.

Was the Amesha Spenta, Aramaiti, as Mother earth, the original third member of the trinity? Was she reduced to an angelic quality, as was Mithras, by Zoroaster, then restored, along with Mithras, but as Anahita? Anahita is recognized as partly non-Iranian, and was perhaps introduced to fill a gap. Herodotus thought she came from Assyria or Arabia, but he thought her name was Mithras, an odd mistake unless the Persians so closely identified them as to make them twins. Achaemenian inscriptions *do* associate the two closely, and another link was that she had a bull sacrificed in her honour (suggesting she became Cybele), and Mithras is traditionally depicted in the Roman mithraea as slaughtering a bull.

In the reign of Darius II, two temples to Anahita already existed, one according to Plutarch probably citing

Ctesias, at Pasargardae, and one, according to Tacitus, set up in Asia Minor (Hierocaesarea) by Cyrus. No sign of a temple to Anahita has been found at Pasagardae but the source could have meant Babylon, Darius's practical capital city. The other will have been set up by Cyrus the Younger, a son of Darius, not Cyrus the Great, in about 405 BC. So, Darius, a Babylonian accustomed to the veneration of the goddess Ishtar, seems to have stimulated a growth of interest in the Persian Ishtar, Anahita.

The Persian cults of Anahita identified her with Venus, the morning star, and the Greeks therefore called her Aphrodite, but also saw her as Athene, a warrior goddess. Persians sculpt her as a beautiful young woman wearing a fine cloak and sandals and a jewelled coronet. She carries twigs of a sacred bush. She is so important in the later cult that the *Aban Yasht* describes Ahuramazda himself as offering libations to her for the moral protection of Zoroaster. Pliny and Strabo both attest to her popularity—her cult spreading to Armenia, Cappadocia, Pontus and Cilicia. Independent proof comes from Lydia where there are inscriptions to her as a goddess of waters, fertility and procreation, like Ishtar and Nin-Ella.

Anahita was identified with the mythical Persian river Harahvaiti, an accepted yazata, responsible for fertility and procreation, and source of all the water in the world. As a yazata, Harahvaiti was commonly addressed by her titles and epithets rather than her name, and among them was “anahita” meaning “pure”. The divinity was properly “Anahiti”, meaning the “Pure One”, so the two originally separate entities could easily have been identified. The older goddess, represented by Venus, had no association with water, and nor did Ishtar and Inanna, the Babylonian goddesses, yet Anahita became known as a water goddess, though retaining the war-goddess aspect of the planetary deity. She became in Sassanian times almost to be an Iranian Kali, and warriors placed the skulls of defeated enemies in her shrine at Istakhr.

Tiri, who is Nabu, was absorbed into Zoroastrianism at this time too, by association with the yazata, Tishrya, Sirius. It must have been a clever Mage to equate Mercury with Sirius, but it was done. The Babylonians regarded Sirius and Spica to be aspects of a single goddess, a manifestation of Ishtar—presumably the constellation of the Virgin. The sixth month was presided over by Ishtar, and Spica was its star.

Once instituted, the cult of Anahita seems to have become popular, because it became rich. In 209 BC, Antiochus III, the Greek king of Seleucia, stripped the temple of Anahita (Aine) at Egbatana (Hamadan). It incorporated gold and silver bricks, gold plated columns and silver roof tiles, a tribute to generosity in poverty, ignorance and superstitious fear. The priestesses of Aine of Egbatana seem to have remained chaste, like nuns. Artaxerxes also seems to have invested special public fire temples where a sacred flame burned perpetually in a sacred enclosure that could only be entered by people who were ritually pure to pray.

## **Zoroastrian Cosmogony**

Ahuramazda was light and life and created all that was good and pure—truth, law and social order. He was “Lord”, “The Wise Lord”, the “All Father”, as creator, “The First and the Last” and “The Father of the Good Thought”:

I conceived of thee, O Mazda, in my thought that thou, the first art the last—that thou art Father of Good Thought, for thus I apprehended thee with mine eye—that thou didst truly create Right, and art the Lord to judge the actions of life. ( *Yt* 31:8)

The Zoroastrians believed that the world as created by Ahuramazda was perfect, with no evil. Ahuramazda was the Lord of Wisdom that the priests considered filled them with Holy Spirit, Spenta Mainyu, if they were worthy. There is one primeval plant, animal and man from which all others are made. The first man Gayo Maretan had no illness, no hunger and no thirst. The sun was fixed in the sky at noon, so there was no time.

Nature was the good creation of the god, Ahuramazda. The English word “paradise” is from the Avestan “Pairidaize” and it is worth noting that the Garden of Eden of *Genesis* in the *Septuagint* is called “paradise” in its sinless condition before the fall. Indeed, “Garden” is perhaps from the Avestan “Garod-man” meaning house of songs—the ancient Aryan name of heaven. Is it also just a strange “coincidence” that Ahuramazda, like Yehouah, created the world in six stages (days?) covering the sky, water, earth, plants, animals, and mankind? Zoroaster saw two primeval spirits as twins in opposition. Ahuramazda was Spenta Mainyu and the other spirit was Angra Mainyu, who is the original Satan and the reason why righteous people suffered. But Spenta Mainyu elsewhere seems to exist independently. The Holy Spirit of the Jewish god is just the same, and then the Christians extended the concept to the Son, who is the Father, but acts independently. The son of Ahuramazda was Mithras!

Western scholars in the nineteenth century thought Ahuramazda was the father of both spirits and the Parsees of India, influenced by then by Christian missionaries were glad to agree. They argued the Evil Spirit is actually one of the two aspects of Ahuramazda himself—he calls them, in the *Gathas*, “my spirits”—the other being the Holy Spirit, which initiated Righteous Creation by “speaking it!” Identification of the Holy Spirit with Ahuramazda himself is a misinterpretation of the prophet who calls Ahuramazda the *Holiest Spirit* so that it was not difficult for people to think he meant the *Holy Spirit*. In the passage in which he makes this reference to Mazda as the holiest spirit he also declares him to be a god beyond the universe—a transcendental god:

The Holiest Spirit chooses Right, he that clothes himself with the massy heavens as a garment. (Y 30:5)

The implication is that Ahuramazda is beyond the heavens which are merely his outer manifestation, his clothing or girdle. Interestingly, the planets were considered chained demons but the constellations, being aspects of the sun, were helpful entities. In the later development of the religion, Ahriman is identified with the Evil Spirit, and Ahuramazda himself with the Holy Spirit. The advantage Ahuramazda had over Ahriman was that he only of the two could see the future and therefore have confidence in his ultimate victory. Ahriman was banished to hell from where he continued to foment trouble for the world through his armies of demons.

However, contrary to this view that Ahura mazda had two sides to his character, the scholarship of Professor Boyce, who has spent her adult life studying Zoroastrianism and is adamant that the original concept was entirely dualistic, must be upheld. The fact that an attempt was made later to explain why there were two equal twins by inventing Zurvanism tends to back her up. If they are already aspects of Ahuramazda there is no need for it.

This admission of an independent evil god is abhorred by Christians, but it means that the Zoroastrian god is entirely good, a claim that cannot be made about the Jewish god, whatever the Clappies might think (*Isa* 45:7). Evil is alien to Ahuramazda and he has to defeat it. In Judaeo-Christian mythology, god somehow lets evil into the world as a by-product of free-will, then has to sacrifice himself to be rid of it, though as yet there is no sign

of it going! Zoroaster seemed to know that in practice the dual principle was a question of human choice, and he poses it as exactly that, but those who chose right had to be rewarded and the ones who chose evil punished, so he invented the cosmic battle in which we all participate throughout history until the Good are rewarded in eternity, but not the Evildoers.

Zoroastrianism presumes the existence of the two opposing principles, but they live in the Spirit World where they cannot interact with each other. Ahuramazda created the tangible, material world as a good world—the material world is good, having been created by the Holy Spirit. The Evil Spirit then contends with the Good Creation within it! It does not make an entirely separate Evil Creation of its own, its aim is precisely to spoil the Creation of the Holy Spirit. This is the opposite of Orphic, Gnostic, Christian and Manichaeian ideas that make the world utterly evil and corrupt, and suitable only for cosmic destruction.

Boyce is emphatic that Ahuramazda did not stand above the Holy and Evil Spirits. Nowhere, she insists, in the original Zoroastrian tradition is Ahuramazda anything other than equal to the Holy spirit, and the Evil Spirit is his adversary, equal too in all but one respect to do with time. Ahuramazda had foresight, but Angra Mainyu had none.

The Evil Spirit can only react whereas the Good Spirit has foresight, the only advantage it has over its twin. Ahuramazda exists before the Evil Spirit is aware of him. Ahuramazda, with his foresight now sees what is happening and what the outcome will be. He offers the Evil Spirit a truce, but is refused. Ahuramazda creates his spiritual world and then Ahriman catches on and creates his own spirits, taking a fixed time of 3000 years. The *Slavonic Enoch* expresses perfect Zoroastrianism:

Before anything was, before all creation came to pass, the Lord established the Aion of Creation. Thereafter he created all His Creation, the visible and the invisible.

Then before anything else happens, Ahuramazda suggests to the Evil Spirit that they battle for similar fixed times and, lacking foresight, Ahriman agrees. Mithras, who has already been created as the God of Covenants, watches over the agreement. Ahuramazda creates the physical world in six steps, and the fravashis, taking another 3000 years. The Evil Creation takes another 3000 years. This is the first part of the era of battle between good and evil.

When plants appeared in the Aryan Creation, they first appeared as an unusual tree that had all the other plants within it. The Evil Spirit poisoned it but Ameretet caught it as it withered and made the seeds of all plants from it. This suggests a memory of tree worship. Xerxes, according to Herodotus, decorated a magnificent plane tree on his way to war with the Greeks, and Xenophon says a gold and jewelled sculpture of a plane tree was venerated at the Achaemenian court (possibly an image of the Primeval Tree). Several Zoroastrian sacred sites in Persia consisted of a sacred tree by a sacred spring. Tree cults were popular in India, so this looks to be the living residue of ancient Aryan tree worship. European Indo-Europeans such as the Scandinavians and Saxons worshipped trees, as did the Celtic Druids. Decorating our own familiar Christmas tree could hardly be a more ancient Pagan practice. The decorations are supposed to remind the tree of how it is in full fruit, and prepare it for awakening again for a new season in spring. It comes from Germany but Luther is said to have revived the custom from what he had read about Zoroastrianism.

The fifth creation was that of animals beginning with a primeval bull that was slain. It is a memory of ancient bull sacrifice to fertilize the ground. The seed of the slain primeval bull, taken and purified by the moon eventually provides a rebirth for all the animals, but also all the plants again! The Ox-soul was the soul of the original bull from which the seed of all animals came and to which their souls return in unity at the end. It seems that in Zoroastrianism, the bull was still sacrificed at the autumn festival of Mithras, a re-enactment of the primeval sacrifice, replenishing the earth for the following spring. The Evil Spirit killed the bull, apparently an evil deed, but, in the Zoroastrian myth, Ahuramazda turned evil into good, in generating the variety of life from the evil act. So re-enacting the evil deed invites the good deed of fecundity to follow.

On the opposite bank of a primeval river, in the legend, lived Gayo Maretan, the primeval man. He is not really a man, judging from his description, but a notional seed of man, and his name means “Mortal Life”. His fate is also to be poisoned by the Evil Spirit only to yield up the whole variety of mankind from his spores purified by the sun and then released by a rhubarb plant. So, mankind was the sixth Creation.

This Great River, and a Great Sea that appears in Aryan myth cannot be certainly identified now, but seem likely to be the Volga and the Caspian Sea or the Don and the Black Sea. The Airyanem Vaija (Aryan Expanse) will be the Eurasian Steppes.

Ahuramazda creates things by thinking them. The concept of God's Logos is more than his Word because it implies reason or thought, thus approaching the Iranian idea. Yasht 44:7 (cf Isa 44:5) speaks of the Creator of all things through “Bounteous Spirit”. The word “Bounteous” is a deliberate choice by the translators to maintain the Jewish scriptures as unique. “Spenta” is better translated as “Holy” as Boyce admits rather than “Bounteous”. All of the Good Creation of Ahuramazda is “Holy”, an idea that was disastrously lost in Christianity, which rather sees the material world as evil, as the Gnostics did. “Amesha” literally means immortal, being exactly the same word, and so the Ameshas were immortals or gods. Yasht 31:8 refers to Ahuramazda as the “beginning and the end”.

So, discovering the perfect creation of Ahuramazda via his Good Spirit, the Evil Spirit attacked the world and caused evil to appear, disease and illness and old age, and plants, animals and the first man started to die, night began to fall, the evil brood of animals appeared, snakes, insects and cats. The material Creation was static consisting of only the primeval creatures, but it was then attacked by the Evil Spirit who killed the primeval man, bull and plant thus introducing death into the world. But the death of the primeval ones only provided the seed for the creation of the plants, animals and humanity. The sacrifice of life brought forth more life, and the fact that the Evil Spirit had inadvertently sacrificed was a result of his great lack—foresight. The world was now mortal and therefore changing through death and re-birth, and devout sacrifice helped keep life going for the Good Creation. Zoroastrianism does not see the world as the domain of the Evil God—it was created and remains the Good Creation of Ahuramazda.

C S Lewis in his fantasies shows the world as being assailed by evil from outside. That is like the Zoroastrian idea. In Zoroastrianism, the cosmic battle cannot be fought on the cosmic level, so it is fought on the material plane. This battleground exists only for the period of limited time, called the “Time of Long Dominion”. In this time, which is really the history of the material world, the spiritual creation occurs, then the corporeal one, and the battle ensues. The ice age broke on the ancient Aryan home and the onrush of winter, sent by the Evil One caused the great migration to the south, to Iran and India, and the southwest, to Greece and the countries of

Europe, beginning human history—it did too!

The Evil Spirit created death when Ahuramazda created life and went on to create all that is evil as the opposites of good things, like darkness, filth, sin, sodomy, menstruation, pests and vermin like ants, flies, locusts, rats and mice, serpents—everything that plagued people and stop earth from being Paradise. Satan was the *Lord of Darkness* and hell, and of all the evil spirits that lived everywhere, the spiritual equivalent of earthly flies and rats, pestering, annoying and tempting people to commit crime and sin. So it will continue, the battle progressing until the end of history. Then the world will be returned to its original perfect state, endless time begins and everything remains perfect for eternity. This is the “Third Time”.

Death and filth were both the work of the Evil Spirit, so Persians considered dead bodies as unclean. Uncleanliness was subject to penalties under Persian law, so a crime as dastardly as defiling the king's throne by sitting on it, even accidentally, was death. Persians took this uncleanness so far they were concerned not to defile the elements—earth, water, wind and fire, which they revered—with dead bodies so did not bury, burn or immerse them. The dead were exposed on a mountain side to be eaten by wolves and vultures, then special silent towers were built for the same purpose. The bones were later collected and placed in ossuaries in rock tombs.

The religion they introduced to Jerusalem had the same obsessions with cleanliness but seems to have forgotten the reason—the association of the devil with filth. The Rabbis today say cleanliness laws are for hygienic reasons. The clear advantage in those days of having a fear of filth was that it kept people inclined to be healthy and free of diseases, and the Persians were, but these people, Jews or Zoroastrians, knew little of hygiene.

Zoroaster was sent by Ahuramazda to reaffirm the ancient faith that was known to Yima Khshaeta and before him, the first man Gayo Maretan, and to unveil new revelations. Zoroaster is born at 9000 years to give his revelations to strengthen the forces of the Good Creation in Humanity. He was the first prophet and would be followed by three saviours.

Each millennium thereafter a saviour is born until history ends at 12,000 years. Because evil was falsely introduced into Ahuramazdas's perfection, when the final saviour comes, the world will be purged of it by fire, a feature also of old German mythology. There is some hint of a cosmic battle at the end when the armies of Good and Evil meet, but the main battleground is the material world, and nothing suggests otherwise. Paradise will be established on earth, in the form of the kingdom of Ahuramazda—the kingdom of God. The mightiest words in the religion are in the *Ahunavar* which ends:

God's kingdom will come.

The call for a saviour appears as “may righteousness be embodied” (Yt 43:16) and “one greater than good” (Yt 43:3) was to follow him. He was to be a descendant of Zoroaster, just as the Jewish Saviour was to be of the seed of David, so not divine but fully human, again like the Jewish messiah, but not like the Christian one. Nevertheless, he was to be miraculously conceived, from the preserved seed of Zoroaster, by a virgin who bathes in the holy lake where the seed is kept. He therefore continues the role given in the Zoroastrian scheme of salvation to humanity itself as opposed to gods. The saviours would be men, even if rather unusual ones.



Zoroastrianism attributes to man a distinguished part in the great cosmic struggle. It is above all a soteriological part, because it is man who has to win the battle and eliminate evil.

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The division of world history into twelve periods in Jewish apocalyptic is another reflexion of its Zoroastrian roots. Though this full scheme is from late Zoroastrian books, it is confirmed in outline by the *Gathas*.

The implication of the *Gathas* is that this time will be “soon” as it is for Christians, and Zoroaster seemed to think he would be the Saoshyant. The word is also used in the past tense and in the plural implying that there had been or would be others besides himself, showing either that Zoroaster thought the previous Saoshyants had already been, or that it was also used of a good man—a saint. Later, it became an aim for Righteous men to be known as a Saoshyant through devotion and good praxis.

## **The Fate of the Soul**

For Zoroaster, Ahura Mazda had revealed a message that was a matter of “life and death”—the fate of the soul after death. It depended on its earthly existence. A person’s every act, word and thought affects the judgement of their soul after death. The sum total of anyone’s thoughts, words and deeds determine the fate of their soul in the other world.

Everyone’s life falls into two parts—its earthly portion and that which is lived after death. At the “Last Judgement”, the record of people in life is judged, but meanwhile many people will have died. This is where the idea of heaven comes in, as a place for the Righteous to tarry until the end of “Time of Long Dominion”. This is the proper belief of Christianity, but they have abandoned it for a spiritualism, so simplistic and popular that ministers and priests dare not correct it. The lot assigned to anyone after death is the result and consequence of their life upon earth. Works on earth are strictly reckoned in heaven by Mithra, assisted by the spirit of justice. All the thoughts, words and deeds of each are entered in the book of life as credits—all the evil thoughts, words and deeds, as debts. After death the soul arrives at the Cinvato peretu, or accountant’s bridge, over which lies the way to heaven. Here the statement of his life account is made out. The souls of people were judged on their deeds in life and divided into three categories. If they has a balance of good works in their favour, they were righteous and passed forthwith into paradise and the blessed life. If their evil works outweighed their good, they have chosen the Lie and were cast into the Abyss of torment and woe, falling under the power of Evil, where “the pains of hell are his portion for ever”. Should the evil and the good be equally balanced, the soul passed into an intermediary stage of existence, a type of purgatory, and its final lot is not decided until the last judgement. The course of inexorable law cannot be turned aside by any sacrifice or offering, nor yet even by the free grace of God. Ahuramazda had appointed these rules out of his grace to humankind but he was not subject to whims and fancies so would not bend to entreaties of any kind. Zoroaster made no allowance for repentance and remission of sins, though Zoroastrian churches now do, perhaps influenced by Christianity. An evil deed could never be struck out by any means, repentance, indulgences, prayer or god’s fancy. Wicked actions cannot be undone, but an evil deed in the heavenly account can be atoned for by a surplus of good deeds. Once evil was done, it was entered into the *Book of Life* and the best that the evildoer could then do in life was to try to balance it out with sufficient good work to merit a favourable judgement.

In several places in the *Avesta* but notably *Vendidad* 19:27ff, Ahura Mazda answers Zarathustra's question about the fate of the soul after death. While the demons responsible for putrefaction attack the dead body, for three days and nights the soul lingers, one each for Good Deeds, Good Words and Good Thoughts, and on the dawn of the fourth day, when Mithras appears on the mountains as the sun rises, it departs.

Zoroastrians had no reactionary idea of original sin. The Wise Lord would reward the good act, speech and thought, and punish the bad—people were judged in heaven for their works on earth. Mithras was the heavenly judge, a role that later Christ assumed. Everyone's works and deeds were entered in a *Book of Life* as a balance sheet of credits and debits upon which the judge would pass his judgement.

The dead soul journeyed to the bridge to heaven where the book was opened. The honest and the deceitful have both to be assessed at the account-keeper's bridge where their deeds are measured. Each person meets his actions in life (Daena) in the form of a fifteen year old girl who is more beautiful or ugly depending on the balance of the person's good and bad deeds, though this girl is merely an illumination in *Vendidad* 19:27. The girl is likely to be the origin of the houris of the Moslem paradise.

The account-keeper's bridge has many paths across, some being broad and some as narrow as a razor's edge. The truthful souls take the broad routes and the lying souls have to try to balance their way across on the narrow routes. The truthful are therefore able to cross into heaven easily but the false find it impossible to cross and fall into the Abyss. The concept of the bridge will be based on the rainbow, seen as a bridge to heaven, and appears in Islam as the Arch of Al-Sirat.

The souls of ones with a positive balance walked across into paradise, first the heaven of good thoughts, good words and good deeds and then to the final destiny, the House of Songs, the home of Ahura Mazda—paradise. Those with a negative balance fell into the chasm or Abyss to suffer the pains of hell—not eternal torture in flames but, in the later tradition, 9000 years of intense loneliness in the frozen northern wastes. The mistaken idea of eternal burning comes from the fate of the wicked world at the End of Time when the Last Judgement occurred.

No bad thoughts, words, and deeds, are ever forgiven. Everyone is free to choose between Truth and Lies, between Good and Bad, but the choice has grave consequences. There is no relief from this by intercession, prayer, incantations, magic formulae, belief in any favoured doctrine or being born into any particular ethnic grouping. God has laid out His rules and they shall apply to all dead souls without favour.

Humanity does not have this knowledge and is too easily ensnared by the evil powers. People cannot distinguish between truth and lies, and so Ahuramazda in his grace sent a prophet to lead them by the right way, the way of salvation. Zoroaster was fit for the mission, and felt within him, the call of Ahuramazda. In calling him, Ahuramazda was making a last appeal to humanity before The End. Like John the Baptist, Jesus and his apostles, Zoroaster thought the fulness of time was near, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He often spoke directly with God and His archangels. Zoroaster called himself a prophet (manthran), a priest, and a saviour (saoshyant, the helper of those come to be judged by their deeds).

The *Gathas* say little regarding ritual practices of Zoroastrian doctrine. The *Gathas* are essentially eschatological—revelations concerning the last things, future lot whether bliss or woe, concerning human souls,

promises for true believers, threats for misbelievers, and confidence that the future will be triumph of the good.

## Salvation

Almost every passage of the *Gathas* refers to eschatology. Nothing in Akkadian religions suggests the world would end. That was Zoroaster's innovation. But, Ahuramazda was sure to triumph and restore the world to his perfect creation—the kingdom of God.

Zoroaster, like Jesus, thought Eunomia—the kingdom, the power and the glory of God—was at hand when he wrote the *Gathas*, as they make plain. The Wise Lord, together with the Amesha Spentas, would finally vanquish the spirit of evil, ending cosmic and ethical dualism. Zoroaster's mission was a final appeal to humanity before it all happened. He thought he would see the end of the world himself and the dawn of the kingdom of Ahuramazda when Ahuramazda, his angels and righteous believers would decisively defeat the evil spirit and his demons. The final epoch would end with a Last Judgment and the utter destruction of the Devil and all his forces of evil. So, he announced an end to the visible world, "the last turn of creation". The world would then be restored only for the good, who would live forever in joy in God's desirable domain. Since the world was to be restored, a resurrection of the dead was necessarily implied, and is found in some of the *Gathas*.

The failure of it to happen forced a theological revision, just as it did for the Christians. The later idea was that advent of Zoroaster began a final epoch of three thousand years by which time Ahuramazda's message would have been spread throughout the world. The End would come when Ahriman and his angels rose out of the Abyss to attack the Good spirit and the Angels of Light. Neither good nor evil would be victorious but eventually Ahriman would be defeated by a Deliverer sent by god, the Saoshyant. The Saoshyant, of the line of Zoroaster or perhaps the prophet himself reincarnated, would herald the beginning of a new age. Ahuramazda promised eternal life to good people:

In eternity shall the souls of the righteous be joyful.

The "Millennium" was the resurrection of the Righteous to live forever in Ahuramazda's perfect Creation, unplagued by death, corruption, disease, flies and all the rest of the Evil Creation. Hardship on earth is done away with and so all hills are flattened so that no one has to exert themselves walking up a hill—the earth would be levelled into a great plain just as it is in *Isaiah* 40. but the great variety of life remains—there is no return to the primeval beings. In the *Slavonic Enoch*:

When all the Creation that was created by the Lord will come to an end, and every man will go to the Great Judgement of the Lord, then the times will perish, there will not be any more years, or months or days, the hours will not be counted any more, but the Aion will be one. And all the Righteous that will escape the Great Judgement of the Lord will join the Great Aion, and at the same time the Aion will join the Righteous, and they will be eternal, and there will not be in them any more labour or suffering or sadness or the expectation of violence.

The "Day of the Lord" is a trial by ordeal of mankind, when the earth would be bathed with molten metal, which burns up the wicked but allows the righteous to bathe in it as in warm milk. When the Righteous emerge unscathed they are united with their souls in their uncorruptible resurrected bodies—bodies in the primeval state

of perfection. This trial by ordeal echoes an ancient practice of the Iranians and other people.

It is the fire referred to by John the Baptist in *Matthew*:

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. (*Mt* 3:11)

Paul makes the parallels even clearer, especially as the passage has been clumsily amended to suit the idea that the believer will be saved irrespective of his sins:

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. (*1 Cor* 3:13-15)

Finally, Ahriman would be cast back into the Abyss and all resurrected righteous souls would live in a cleansed world, the good kingdom or simply the kingdom—Ahuramazda's kingdom, an undivided heaven and earth, free of decay, old age and death—where they lived as immortals alongside the angels in the realm of light, in the eternal fellowship of Ahuramazda. A "future body" in a future resurrection was among the magian beliefs recorded by Theopompus in the fourth century BC. As for the wicked, they were incinerated once and for all in the molten flame never to plague the world again. The molten metal will apparently even purify Hell and kill the evil demons. The molten metal is, of course, from heaven, itself considered made of metal (as a form of stone). So, in the final days of the world, all will be judged and all the dead will be resurrected in their bodies once again. The rebirth occurs at the rebirth, "No Roz", ceremony when the priest faces west instead of east as usual because the cycle of time will cease and the sun will be set at noon forever. The Saoshyant will prepare Haoma in this final holy ceremony or act of worship and give it to humanity so as to make the bodies shining, ageless and immortal. The white Haoma juice prepared by him will be an elixir of immortality that will banish death forever from the world. Death, the instrument of the evil one will no longer prey upon the good creation of Ahuramazda. The Righteous become like the Holy Immortals just as Jesus says in the *New Testament*, accepting that they are angels, immortal inhabitants of heaven.

Suffering, in this material earth and time, is the price of ultimately defeating evil, so it is necessary and commendable, serving a real purpose in helping to defeat the Evil Spirit rather than succumbing to him. Since the Jewish and Christian God is all powerful, there is no explanation in these religions for suffering—an all-powerful god could end it immediately. Ahuramazda is not all-powerful until the end of history, so is excused. The whole blame is with the Devil. Humanity therefore provide Ahuramazda's foot soldiers in the war with his implacable enemy. Human beings individually chose the side they are on, and are ultimately rewarded or punished. Salvation therefore depends upon humanity—upon human choice—not upon God, who expects humans as part of his Good Creation to chose Good and reject Evil. He does not stick his finger in human history and stir it up like the Jewish God, and expects his human army to remain loyal and fight their battles against Evil confident that by making the right choice, the battle will be won and they will be rewarded. Should anyone despair in the face of adversity, the Amesha Spentas were ready to offer their qualities in support.

*Yasht* 34:10-11 say that Health and Life are the rewards of Ahuramazda's "Desirable Kingdom"—desirable for

the Righteous People on earth. It is, of course, the victory of the Good Creation and so in the Judaeao-Christian myth, a return to the unspoilt “Garden of Eden”. While the Evil Spirit was active in the world spoiling the Good Creation with his Evil deeds, the holy kingdom could not be in earth, but at the end of “Time of Long Dominion”, the desirable kingdom began, because the Evil Spirit was confined. Christian concepts are close indeed to this outlook.

## Doctrine of Humanity

In his doctrine of humanity, Zoroaster began with the freedom of everyone to choose their ethical course in life. Ahuramazda created humans with free will to think, say and do as they choose, and so people can be tempted by the evil powers. Zoroaster had a doctrine of free will and individual responsibility for all actions, writing:

Whoso worketh ill for the Liar by word or thought or hands, or converts his dependents to the Good, such men meet the will of Ahuramazda to his satisfaction.

This freedom of the will is also clearly expressed in *Yasna*, 31:11:

Since thou, O Mazda, didst at the first create our being and our consciences in accordance with thy mind, and didst create our understanding and our life together with the body, and works and words in which man according to his own will can frame his confession, the liar and the truth-speaker alike lay hold of the word, the knowing and the ignorant each after his own heart and understanding. Armaiti searches, following thy spir~t, where errors are found.

People take part in the cosmic conflict through their lives and deeds in the world. By every good thought, word and deed, by continually keeping a pure body and soul, every person impairs the power of evil and strengthens the might of goodness, laying a claim for reward from Ahuramazda. By every evil thought, word and deed, and self-abasement, everyone increases evil and renders service to the Evil One.

Other religious systems have evil spirits, but Zoroaster’s implied division of the world between the powers of Good and of Evil, both evenly balanced until the final conflict, effectively invented our modern concept of the Devil, who manifested himself within people as the the *Druj* or the *Lie*:

Let none of you listen to the Liar’s words.

In the battle of Good and Evil, humans had free will to refuse evil—people were free to side with either of the two spirits. It was everyone’s personal choice. Everything that people did in life involved these choices, every bad choice extending Satan’s influence and every good choice helping to keep him chained in hell. By choosing righteousness people were their own saviours.

Bliss shall flee from them that despise Righteousness. In such wise do you destroy for yourselves the spiritual life.

If they became “Followers of the Lie” they could expect the worst but the righteous had naught to fear:

...at the last the Worst Existence shall be the followers of the Lie, but the Best thought to him that follows Right. Of these twain Spirits, he that followed the Lie chose the worst things; the Holiest Spirit chose Right...

Herodotus, writing about the Persians of his day, recorded:

They teach boys, from five years to twenty, three things only—to ride, to shoot and to be truthful...Most disgraceful of all is lying.

Persians were also sexually prudish and forbade masturbation, promiscuity and prostitution, and rape and sodomy were punished by death as it was for the Babylonians. Other capital crimes included treason, cremating or burying the dead, murder, invading the king's privacy or approaching one of his concubines. Among the ways people were despatched were crucifixion, hanging and stoning.

Persians had a strong sense of correct behaviour and did not eat or drink in the street or spit. Eating only sufficient was a virtue, and Persians only had one meal a day and drank only water. Persians were hospitable, generous, warm hearted, open, and honest.

The summary of the Zoroastrian practical ethic is the short mantra:

Good Thoughts. Good Words. Good Deeds.

The choice made has its effects on the five aspects of the human person:

1. Vitality (Ahu) is the strength of life including moral strength and so applies to physical vitality and mental vitality where it seems to overlap with Baodha.
2. Self (Daena) is a measure of a person's individual choices in life and manifests itself as Conscience, a personal sense of responsibility for actions. It is separate from Urvan and from Fravashi but appears to the person after death, when they go for judgement, as a maiden who is pretty or ugly according to the sum total of anyone's actions in life.
3. Wisdom (Baodha) guides the person in making the right choices as if it were a personal light to illuminate their path. The Avestan word is the same word as Veda and Boddhi.
4. Soul (Urvan) is the person's spiritual body that suffers the results of their life choices, ultimately being lost into the Abyss of Hell if the choices are evil or residing in paradise, as fravashis if good.
5. Heavenly Double (Fravashi, Confession of Faith) is a person's guardian angel. Zoroaster called people to support Ahuramazda's goodness, and those who "confessed faith" in Ahuramazda in the struggle between right and wrong, were granted a guardian angel to help them achieve virtue. It is always good and equates with the soul of righteous people. The concept is similar to the genius of the Romans, the ka of the Egyptians, and Plato might have taken his concept of "Ideas" from the Persian. Even animals have their fravashi, and so do objects like forces of Nature and stars, suggesting that the Star of Bethlehem was pursued by the Magi because the author of *Matthew* considered it signified the fravashi of a god. Later, the fravashis of particularly holy people were revered in the same way that Christians revere their saints.



Besides the possible reference to the Star of Bethlehem as a fravashi, the concept occurs twice more in the Christian New Testament. When Jesus is made to speak of “little ones” in the gospels he is not speaking of babies but of the newly penitent apostate Jews that have joined his Nazarenes.

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. (*Mt* 18:10)

The penitents have become righteous by repenting and taking baptism, and so their Heavenly Doubles behold the face of God, something possible only for the righteous. Their angels in heaven are fravashis. The same allusion appears in *Acts*:

A damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter’s voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. (*Acts* 12:13-15)

Peter could not have been there, they thought, so the double of him was his fravashi, his heavenly Double or Guardian Angel.

## **Fravashis**

Fravashis or protective spiritual doubles were mainly creatures of the night. The time of night, from sunset to sunrise was dedicated to fravashis. They were venerated at their own festival held at the New Year, or rather on the last night of the old year, in the old calendar being in the autumn, so broadly corresponding with the Christian “All Hallows Eve” (Halloween) and “All Souls Day”, but later, with the change in the calendar, in the month Nisan or roughly March to us—Easter—the Persian festival commemorated in the scriptural *Book of Esther*! The ritual ended with the lighting of fires before dawn to assist the fravashis to return to their abode before the sun rose. Their association with night, the creation of the Evil Spirit, and the fact that worship otherwise was not to be done at night shows that the fravashis were not thought of as fully benign. They are the relic of the worship of dead spirits, and originally might have been good or bad.

Fravashis came from the old Iranian cult of heroes, whose spirits were venerated and came to be thought of as assigned to each person as a spiritual protector. Fravashis were certainly warlike but were pictured as winged females that lived at first in the air, and later as they were thought of as increasingly benign, in heaven hobnobbing with the gods. Yasht 23:3 implies the fravashis were not in heaven but on earth, so they indeed lived in the air answering and delivering prayers and responding to calls for help. They were angels. The thirteenth Yasht describes a fravashi as flying like a well winged bird, and the winged figure of Ahuramazda shown on Persian sculptures might be meant to be the fravashi of the High God—all righteous entities having one. Yasht 13:12 describes them as “fravashis of the just” confirming them as spirits of righteous people. Ultimately, dwelling in heaven with the gods gave them the odour of sanctity and they were assigned as assistants to the Holy Spirit at the Creation. So spirits of righteous people were present at the Creation, a concept that emerges in the Scrolls and in the myth of Jesus.

Zoroaster favoured the word “urvan” translated as soul for the after-life spirit, but the fravashis seemed too popular to displace, and in the evolution of Zoroastrianism the two began to overlap, and mingle also with the

khvarenah to some degree. Urvan however was the person's soul that went for judgement. The long hymn to the fravashis shows the mingling of the two ideas ( *Yt* 13). The difference between them is that the fravashis had power and could be prayed to, whereas the soul had none and had to be prayed for.

The soul did not depart from the body immediately on death and it is an ancient belief of the Iranians that it remained for three days before ascending, requiring detailed rituals. Note that the scriptural idea of a general resurrection on the third day in the book of Hosea (Saviour, suggesting the Persian king) and perhaps the messianic feast come from the same source, slightly misunderstood (*Hos* 6:2), and gave rise to the further misunderstanding that Jesus was predicting his own particular resurrection on the third day, when he meant the general resurrection of Hosea. Jonah, in the belly of the whale, is more precise and is used by a late editor of *Matthew* to explain the three days. When anyone died, their souls were tormented in hell for three days for whatever sins they had committed in life then, on the fourth day, the soul departed to judgement. On that day special funeral rituals were held and food was offered for the soul and his fravashi in the next world.

That was not the end of it, though, because it then had to be honoured for thirty years! It was time for a whole generation and ensured that the memory of a deceased father was retained for the next generation. For the initial three days, the relatives fast and display their grief. On the third day a full set of clothing is prepared for the dead man and consecrated while three religious offices are said during the day. First in the morning an animal sacrifice is made, the fat being used to feed the flame that carried the soul aloft at sunrise on the fourth day. Further offerings are consecrated daily for 30 days, followed by another sacrifice, then offerings are made at 30 day intervals for the whole year of 360 days. For the next 30 years the offering is made annually on the anniversary of the departure of the soul. These are ancient practices because they are followed by the Brahmins too.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 2. How Persia Created Judaism**  
**Zoroastrian Influences on Judaism and Christianity (Part III)**  
**Zoroastrianism: Practices**

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### **Maga, The Magian Fellowship**

The word for Magus (“magu”) was never used by Zoroaster and is said not to occur in any part of the Avesta. The Vedic word “maghá” is a gift, suggesting a conception like the Christian idea of the “gift” of the Holy Spirit. “Maga” was Zoroaster’s message or gospel. Those who accepted it were “Magavan”, (sometimes considered “Magu”) those with authority (Yt 12:1). The two words—“Maga and Magavan”—are mentioned eight times in the *Gathas* (Maga: Songs 2:11, 11:14, 16:11, 16:16, 17.7 (twice), and Magavan: 6:7, 16:15). Zoroaster calls his Maga as “maz, great” in two Gathic stanzas—2:11 and 11:14. Anyone who has converted is a “magavan”, and as Zoroaster’s invented religion is egalitarian, every “magavan”, regardless of race, sex, or social status, is the same.

The priesthood were the Magi, a class rather than a profession, just as the Brahmins were a caste and the Jewish priesthood were a caste. The Achaemenid king was therefore the top Magus, though he was crowned by the Magian High Priest, just as the Queen of the United Kingdom is the head of the Anglican church but is crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Though, scholars consider the Magi to have have been the priestly class of the Medes, Zoroastrians say they were founded by Zoroaster. The Sanskrit adjective which yields “magi” is used mostly in honour of Indira, the Rig Vedic god of clouds and rains, who brought riches to the Vedic Aryans by driving away drought.

In the beginning, Zoroaster prays to God to lead him to expand his newly founded Fellowship. Later, he is joined by king Hystaspes and his sagacious team, and the work to promote the “Great Fellowship” gains momentum. Zoroaster’s “best wishes” come true when he watches the Fellowship grow far and wide.

So, Zoroastrian priests became important in the Iranian diaspora. Magi accompanied the army everywhere it went to bring it fortune by making appropriate sacrifices, or ministering to officers and men, and when ex-soldiers were settled on the land, some priests with their families settled too. Other priests are likely to have come out with the peasant farmers, and more exalted ones with the nobility. Originally they were known collectively in eastern Mediterranean lands as magousaioi, a Greco-Semitic plural for Persian “magu” (Mage, priest), but it came to be used for Persian colonists generally, showing that, to outsiders, all Iranians were Zoroastrians, and the ethnic and religious names were used for each other. Priests themselves then were called by the Greek magoi.

Besides priests who ministered to lay families in the traditional way, there were temple priests. Zoroastrian sanctuaries in Asia Minor are documented, the oldest according to tradition being at Zela in Pontic Cappadocia, founded in the 6th century BC by Cyrus the Great himself or his generals. According to the Iranian custom of worshipping in high places, the sanctuary was established on a hill, banked up yet higher and encircled by a wall (the Jerusalem temple is on a hill and encircled by a wall). Later this hill bore one of the imposing temples

to Anahita, by which the presence of Persians is strikingly attested in Asia Minor. Other jobs Magi had were as seers, interpreting dreams, as teachers and as curators of royal tombs.

The Good Religion was remarkably hierarchical in its arrangement of living units—effectively military. Units began with the home in which lived the family, and worked upwards through settlements and districts in which lived communities, to lands and the world in which lived fellowships and the Great Fellowship of All. Five levels united humanity. Notionally, no race, no colour, and no profession divided the people into upper to lower castes. Only good and better thoughts, words and deeds in serving humanity and promoting the world give anyone recognition.

After the Gathic period, the “Maz Maga”, the Great Fellowship of Zoroaster reverted to the primitive caste system of the Aryans—the priests, the warriors who enjoyed the fruits, and a third caste of labourers and producers.

Fire was probably always an element of the Zoroastrian ceremony. It was the “son of Ahura Mazda”, a conscious living entity of divine glory, a holy warrior against evil, the giver of health, the bestower of boons. Ahura Mazda (GY 43-9) commands Zoroaster who declares he would pay homage of his offering “unto Thy Fire”. Images of fire altars are found on seals with turrets at the corners, reminiscent of altars with horns described in the bible. Excavations of ruins of some fire temples in Iran show they predate the Achaemenian dynasty. The three towers in Fars are the ruins of fire-temples, they are Zindan-i-Suleiman, at Pasargard, Ka’ba-i-Zardusht at Naqsh-e Rostem, and the tower of Nurabad. The Zindan was built by Cyrus, the Great. This Zindan-i-Suleiman, the enclosed Fire-Temple was destroyed by Gaumata the Magian pretender and rebuilt by Darius. Masudi has alluded that Ka’ba-i-Zardusht was a fire temple.

Fire priests may have taken over the Good Religion without understanding it properly and institutionalized it into what we have today as the “Traditional” Zoroastrianism. The fire priests do not mention the Gathic “Magavans” and the Zoroastrian “Maz Maga”. The two terms are found in the Later *Avesta* only twice in doubtful interpretations.

Yet the fires were not only for sacrifice. Prof Mary Boyce explains the Yasna Haptanhaiti, which can be attributed with all reasonable certainty to Zoroaster, is a fixed liturgy for the service. The Zaothar or officiating priest and the Raaspi or the responding priest are both present, confirming that this Yasna is a ritual. It is composed in mantric language, many words of which, forty-three in all, almost one to each verse, are now unknown in meaning, suggesting an esoteric or technical language of worship. The celebrants refer to themselves as “mantrans” implying the rhythmic spiritually created by the chanting. The rite takes place in the presence of fire, as the celebrant confirms who says:

In community with this Fire here, we first approach Thee, Mazda Ahura,

suggesting the fire had a mediating role. In the west, the professional priests of the Median “nation” were clever enough to retain their caste (or “tribe” in the word of Herodotus), and at the same time call themselves “Magu”, their pronunciation of “Magava”. Then “Magu” was Grecized into “Magos” and its plural “Magi”. The word “magic” derived from “Magu” shows how highly learned and advanced the Magi were perceived in their knowledge and crafts. Non-Iranians thought they were “sorcerers”.

All the priests of the Babylonian and Assyrian creeds were granted the name “Magi” when their sects were Mazdayasnaized. Spooner has shown that the Zoroastrian Magi were important also in India and their practices are reflected in the Mahabharata. The unadulterated religion of Zoroaster did not last long enough even under the Persian kings, and the Persian empire also did not last long enough to complete Cyrus and Darius’s project of creating a true universal religion.

## Initiation of Zoroastrians

Zoroastrians must be properly initiated by ordained priests into the religious community. In the ancient times this occurred at the age of fifteen, the ancient Iranian age of maturity to become responsible for his or her religious, moral and communal life. For Jews it is 13. This initiation rite has been practiced since the earliest years of the faith.

The candidate wears a sacred white undershirt, and a sacred girdle. Almighty God, Ahura Mazda, made the sacred girdle studded with stars and put it around the earth. The stars that surround the earth are the original Kusti that Aryans wear, placed there by Ahura to guide the world first in the good religion. Aryans, children of Ahura, follow the order of the cosmos when they place their sacred Kusti around the waist as the most ancient commandment of God.

King Yima Kshaeta or Jamshid is said to have introduced the sacred girdle, centuries before Zoroaster. The ceremony seems to be based on the ancient Indo-Iranian custom of investing only the male members of society with the sacred girdle as a sign of their membership within the community. Jews wear a fringed or tasselled garment, but some called it a girdle. Hindus wear a sacred cord that passes over their right shoulder and under their left arm, showing its Iranian origins, but tasselled cords are visible on pictures from Assyria.

Parsi Zoroastrians call this Navote or “Being New Born”. Zoroastrian initiation symbolizes a spiritual rebirth or a second birth. It is a grievous sin for an initiated Zoroastrian to “scamble around naked” meaning not to wear the girdle (Kusti) and undershirt (Sudreh), but, after their initiations, Zoroastrians must ritually untie and tie the sacred girdle every time they pray or prepare themselves for the holy.

This ritual of Padyab-Kustig is performed before a Zoroastrian can engage in any religious activity including praying, approaching the sacred fires, before and after attending funeral ceremonies and eating, to ensure the purity of his body and soul. All Zoroastrians wash on entering a fire-temple, to ensure that every religious act they perform is done in the state of purity of body and soul. These rituals are the origin of the purity rituals of Judaism.



A Young Zoroastrian wearing his Sudreh receives his Kusti

## Worship

Iranians worshipped normally in the open air or before the hearth fire. The Assyrians never recorded any plunder from Median or Persian temples. Seasonal celebrations when people gathered for the festivities were held on high places and by springs of water.

Today, the Zoroastrian prays five times a day towards a fire, the sun, a hearth or even a lamp or candle. The practice was taken over by the Moslems. The main prayer is the *Ahunvar*, part of which says:

To Mazda Ahura is the kingdom whom they have established as the pastor for the Poor.

The Persian word translated as “the Poor”, according to K Barr, means “the true follower of the creed of the prophet, the meek and pious man who stands finally on the side of God”. Barr’s choice of descriptive words is remarkable, echoing the gospels and the dead Sea Scrolls. More remarkable is that in Sogdiana, a country in the east of Iran close to the place of origina of Zoroastrianism, the same word means “disciple”. It suggests that “the poor” of the gospels, as most scholars know, are “the Poor” of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* and the Ebionim of the early Church Fathers, Jewish disciples of Jesus, not poverty stricken people in general.

All acts of worship were accompanied by offerings, under the protection of Mithras, the god of covenants. Offerings were milk, pure water, plant juice, wheat cakes, fruit, vegetables, butter, eggs, domestic animals and fowl. Wine was a lesser offering. Some modern Zoroastrians claim Zoroaster abolished animal sacrifice, but there are many allusions in Zoroastrianism to sacrifice so Zoroaster was not against it. In India the cow was sacred and the Parsees could not make their favourite sacrifice any more, but they made all the lesser ones until the 20th century AD when they abandoned sacrifice all together.

It is general practice in all Zoroastrian ceremonies to create fragrance to delight the divine beings and spirits.

Mary Boyce

Herodotus described the Persians sacrificing animals, depicted in the Mithraea as oxen and implemented also by the Yehudim “returners” from exile as sheep, although the “Slavonic Enoch” remarkably refers to cattle in its passages about sacrifice rather than sheep, suggesting a Zoroastrian, not a Jewish source. Even the Ox-soul is mentioned:

He who herds badly the soul of cattle is lawless toward his own soul, but he who brings a sacrifice of pure cattle, it is a healing, he heals his own soul.

The first man and the primeval ox were killed by the Evil Spirit, but out of their death came the whole of Ahura Mazda’s good creation, because Mazda always succeeds in outwitting the Evil One. In one version of the Persian myth, the fall of man from immortality occurred because the primeval man was lured by the Evil One into killing the primeval ox and eating its flesh without the permission of Ahuramazda. At the End of Time, Mithras would rightfully slay the ox to return immortality to the righteous ones of fallen humanity. Plainly, the myth is a justification of the sacrifice of oxen. The pictures of Mithras killing a bull in the Roman Mithraic religion might represent Mithras as saviour bringing forth goodness out of evil in the world at the End of Time.

Ancient Iranian religious tradition, involved the sacrifice of oxen, and the consumption of intoxicating drinks (haoma), leading like Dionysianism to orgies. Zoroaster *did* seem to condemn some form or forms of intoxication, but poppy eating in that part of the world, or even simply drunkenness might have been the target. Persians were not noted for drinking until Islamic times. Possibly Zoroaster actually banned the old style Iranian rituals



accompanied by orgiastic and intoxicating rites. In other words, the use of sacrifice or haoma drinking to precede or accompany orgies was banned, but not if used to show respect to Ahuramazda's Good Creation. Such a reform is reminiscent of the reform of Dionysianism to Orphism—was Orphism once a form of Mazdayasnaism? The old haoma sacrifice apparently became a symbolic offering when the original intoxicating brew was replaced with an unfermented drink. The similarity with the Essenes' attitude to wine is striking. Zoroaster retained the ancient cult of fire as symbolic of purity and righteousness.

As in the Jewish ritual, a sacrificed animal had to be despatched according to meticulous custom and swiftly. In ancient times the animal had to be conscious when the death blow was struck, but Strabo records that the magi of Armenia concussed the animal first, and the same practice appears in the Dinkard.

The offerings were made in a flat open space and simply laid out on grass—relics of nomadic days. After the ceremony, the grass, having been sanctified, could be burnt in the fire. The priest also grasped a sheaf of the sacred grass while reciting, and this sheaf became a symbol of holy office as the baresman, later a bunch of twigs serving a similar purpose to the Christian bishop's crook. The Zoroastrian "Baresman" might appear in *Ezekiel*: "Lo, they put the branch to their nose".

Fire always had a portion of the sacrifices, the fat to feed it. In Indian ritual the flame was fed the omentum, the fatty part of the entrails. Strabo confirms that the Persians did the same. The fire rituals began with domestic hearth fires. A man kindled a fire when he set up home to start a family and kept it burning from then on until he died when it was allowed to die with him. This was the practice of nomads who had to carry their fires with them as they roamed.

It is unlikely that the followers of the prophet would adopt a practice, the offering of haoma, condemned by him, so quickly after his death. There is no apparent hiatus in the offering rites of the haoma, so its absence in the "Gathas" might be simply due to loss of the relevant passages. Zoroaster in the Avesta is described offering his own worship with the haoma plant. It seems unlikely too that an animal sacrifice should remain when the plant sacrifice, so to speak, was abandoned. The haoma ceremony drew attention to plant life, and made the worshipper concentrate on the Good Creation with benefits for the sacrificer, who could only make offerings with good intent.

The ancient Iranians had little cakes (*draona*) covered with small pieces of holy meat (*myazda*) consecrated in the name of a god or some dead person, and distributed among the worshippers.

The priest had to be in a state of utter ritual purity, and only those in a morally and ritually fit state were allowed to partake of the consecrated offerings. In the rules of the worship of Anahita, which probably reflected general rules of exclusion, no one who was a leper, blind or deaf, or physically deformed, as well as anyone mad, cowardly, spiteful or untruthful could participate (Y 5:92-3).

Busy priests had to be in a state of perpetual purity, and for that reason they took to living apart from the community to avoid contamination, and prepared their own food. There sounds to be a basis here for the Jewish claim that "Pharisee" means "separated", and not what looks obvious, that it means Parsee (Farsee, Persian). The Essenes actually did separate themselves from the common herd. The Zoroastrian priests were so particular about these matters that they avoided contact with each other, again sounding Essene where higher

ranks would avoid contact with lower ranks. Furthermore, the Zoroastrian priests would not share a common table cloth. If a magus had to hand something to an unclean person, they would put it down, withdraw three paces and then invite the other to retrieve it, showing that uncleanness was equivalent to being a corpse. This was particularly true of a “Juddin(!)” the Persian word for someone of another faith.

## **Zoroastrian Laws**

The Zoroastrian scriptures enumerate a number of laws, to which a Zoroastrian should adhere, and vices from which he should guard himself. Here are just some of them that strike a chord with Jewish practice. Zoroastrians must ensure:

1. ritual purity in day-to-day life by a ritual bath forty days after child birth or an ordinary but complete head bath after contact with certain forms of lie, such as a hair-cut, shave, paring of nails, or attending a funeral;
2. they observe seclusion during menses and for forty days after child birth;
3. they wear the sudreh kustī, a holy girdle, at all times of the day and night, except when having a bath,
4. they preserve the seed, of the community, by marrying only within the Zoroastrian community,
5. the silent towers are used as the only lawful method for the disposal of the dead,
6. they perform and participate in all the necessary high and holy liturgical ceremonies and rituals,
7. they observe the Zoroastrian calendar and remember the angels presiding over the thirty days and twelve months,
8. they remember the holy spirits of the dead and observe all the feasts and festivals,
9. they keep a promise at all cost—Yasna 61.3 commands “keep away from a covenant breaker and from one who tampers”,
10. they respect their elders and superiors. “He who does not show respect to an elder will never receive honour” (*Yasna* 29.6);
11. they sincerely atone for their sins whether committed knowingly or unknowingly by committing themselves to good thoughts, words and works.

The basis of the Zoroastrian purity laws is the battle between Good and Evil. Among living things of the Good Creation, it was wrong to kill any immature animal or plant, no sapling, lamb or calf may be killed. Nor might they be maltreated. A dog is clean except, of course, when dead. Any sacrificial animal remains pure once sanctified. But any animal deemed to be of the Evil Creation had to be killed, and magi carried a stick with a leather loop for catching and killing flies, scorpions and snakes.

Metals are of the sky and had to be kept shining. The earth had to be kept clean. Water had to be kept pure, and nothing ritually unclean could be put in it. No excrement, blood or corpses could be put into a stream, river or well. Water had to be used by drawing it from the well or stream first. Even then any article to be cleaned first had to be washed in cow’s urine, then just rinsed off with the drawn water. The cow was, of course, traditionally considered a clean animal by the Aryans, and eventually became sacred to Indians.

Using fire to burn rubbish is a disgrace to Zoroastrians. Even when cooking, care had to be taken not to spill impurity on to the flame, and a man who burns carrion can be summarily killed, just like the man in the scriptures who violates the sabbath.

From the very instant when breath left the body, the corpse was unclean, for the demon of corruption, Nasush, the Nasu Druj or "Corpse Fiend", settles on the body as soon as it dies seeking to corrupt the mourners. The holier the person was, the more corrupting their corpse is. In daily life this demon, to whom much of the antidemonic law refers, was feared more than the Evil Spirit and his other demons. The fear was that, despite precautions, the Corpse Fiend would envelop the living with her corruption, infection, and pollution. Even hair and nail pairings are dead matter and therefore unclean.

Only by the most rigid observance of the prescribed ritual was there safety. The corpse must not pollute holy earth or water. Dessication purifies, and a dead body could lay on stone or sand. Undertakers or anyone who had to move dead bodies could never do it alone but always in pairs linked by a cord. Because the earth is sacred the "Towers of Silence" were introduced for disposing of the dead. Corpses were exposed, carefully tied down by the feet and hair, on the highest points of land where they could be devoured by dogs and vultures. Only when the bones had been thus freed from all dead and dangerous soft matter could they be collected in an ossuary with holes to permit the dead man still to look upon the sun.

Yet, hundreds of Median graves have been found from the eighth century showing that they were not using the "Towers of Silence" which probably came from the east with the spread of Zoroastrianism. Even in the time of Herodotus the Persian nobility had not uniformly accepted exposure of their corpses. The poor had no other choice, and had to gather up the scattered dry bones and bury them in clean sand. Dry waste matter such as bones could be buried. Not until the time of the monarch, Artaxerxes II, was exposure definitely accepted among senior Zoroastrianism nobility. Plutarch records that the generals of the seditious brother of Artaxerxes, Cyrus the Younger, were put to death and their "bodies torn by dogs and birds", as if it were ignominious still, but he might not have understood the custom.

All three Zoroastrian dynasties were embalmed and laid in tombs. Wealthy Iranians preferred to lay their embalmed bodies in rock tombs. Stone, according to the Zoroastrian purity laws, is impermeable and so it was acceptable to put the bodies of kings in stone tombs where they could pollute none of the four elements. In tombs like Cyrus's, there are six tiers of stone protecting the earth, seven levels in total, including ground level. The colonists or "returners" in Judaea were the ruling class and were wealthy, and they adopted the practice of wealthy Persians—they put their dead in rock tombs until they had dessicated, then gathered up the bones and put them in ossuaries.

Until the second century AD, a stone vessel industry around Jerusalem made stone vessels for observant Jews to keep the laws of purity strictly, since according to rabbinic halakha, stone vessels always stay pure. About two hundred stone vessels used for storage and measurement were found at Qumran.

The Zoroastrian purity laws permitted people to be 30 or more paces from a corpse without being polluted by the demon of corruption. "Solomon's Prison" is a stone built funerary tower in the palace at Pasargadae. It has a solid stone base with 29 steps to the entrance where the bodies were laid, and anyone on the ground at the base of the tower was 30 paces from the nearest body. Thus it could be in the palace precinct without anyone having to worry about pollution, but, to be on the safe side, it was also enclosed.

Any thing extruding from the body is impure, including spit, blood, breath and semen. If a priest inadvertently

ejaculated during the period of his initiation, he was considered unworthy of it and was forbidden from being a priest for life. A magus was an hereditary priest but was not obliged to follow the profession of his father. So, magi could be found by choice or perforce in other lines of work, some menial, doubtless because some had proved themselves unworthy. A priest even with a cut could not undertake rituals. A woman in her period is grossly impure. Such things were considered less than the perfection of the ideal physical state created by Ahuramazda.

Because breath was pollution, a magus wore a mask over his nose, to shield any sanctified objects and even the flame from his own impurity, though he had cleansed himself immaculately. Zoroastrians would not drink from a common cup, or eat from a common plate, nor would they speak when eating, reminding us of the Essene practice. A pure person touching someone impure is polluted, but if both were ritually pure, their purity is strengthened. They were not generally willing to believe that others were pure unless they had seen them purified, so priests remained separated in practice.

Menstruating women had to spend a week in a dark room so that even their gaze could not pollute the world. She had to wear old but clean clothes and eat from special plates. In her dark room, she could do nothing domestic except sew or patch—respect for the Good Creation kept Zoroastrians thrifty, and they were reluctant to throw away anything that could be repaired or ritually cleansed (again reminiscent of the Essenes)—but whatever she thus repaired had to be thoroughly purified afterwards. Not surprisingly the menopause was a liberation for Iranian women, but after the years of obligatory separation during their periods, they usually became devoutly ritually pure by choice when menstruation ceased. And curiously, their sacrifice was regarded with respect because it was their role in fighting the Evil Creation.

Childbirth is so unclean that it requires 40 days of purification. That might seem surprising since human beings were part of Ahuramazda's Good Creation, but no childbirth would have been needed at all if it had not been for the machinations of the Evil spirit, so birth was unclean and the copious flow of amniotic fluid and after birth proved what an unclean affair it was. Should a child be born dead, the pollution was all the worse and purification was even longer.

Ritual cleanliness was essential for all ceremonies and foreigners had to be excluded because they were impure. This led to the belief that the rituals were secret. No bodily impurity meant no blemish or deformity, so a priest had to be examined naked before being accepted as a priest. In Judaism, sacrificial animals could not be blemished in any way, so it seems likely that the sacrificing priest was equally restricted, and the Christian idea was that Jesus did not have his legs broken by the Roman soldiers because he had to be a perfect (unblemished) sacrifice to atone for the whole of humanity.

Should anyone become impure, they had to be ritually purified. While the Avesta was recited, the polluted person had to drink ox urine containing a pinch of ash from a sacred fire, then they had to wash in ox or cow's urine followed by a dowsing in pure water. An impure person contaminates any water they touch automatically, so they could not enter water or drink it, even despite the previous washing in cow's urine, because some small part might have been left uncleansed. That is why whoever was purified had to be dowsed rather than bathing. Curiously, the ritual for making cleansing water, in *Numbers 19*, involves the burning of an unblemished red heifer, the ashes of which were kept to make the "water of impurity, for the removal of sin". When someone is polluted from a dead body, the water had to be sprinkled over him. Despite the differences from Zoroastrian

practice, the association of the purification ritual with a cow and poured water seems remarkable in a society where sheep were normally the sacrificial animal of choice. The Israelites that come out of Egypt are herdsmen like the Iranians not shepherds. The Mishnah (the Jewish Oral Law) states that part of the ashes were kept in a jar at the entrance of the Temple Court. The Mishnah adds that nine, at most, red heifers were sacrificed from the time of Moses until the Roman destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, so the ashes lasted a long time, though since Moses was Ezra, it is not as long as it seems at first—about 500 years.

While observing all these laws, the Zoroastrian must guard, among others, against the vices of:

1. Apostasy—According to *Vendidad*, if a person, being a member of the good religion, willingly accepts the commandments of another religion and speaks pejoratively of the Zoroastrian religion, he becomes a sinner;
2. Prostitution—*Vendidad* (18.61-62) declares that, because she grieves Ahuramazda most, the courtesan has less right to live than a snake;
3. Sloth—Zoroastrians pray that Ahuramazda will make people wake up on time and in the *Vendidad* (11.9) they pray, “May the demon of slothfulness which increases idleness depart”.

## Evangelical Zoroastrianism

Parsis have been dubbed the “Jews of India”, supposedly for their business acumen—they dominated the commercial life of Victorian Bombay. But who knows that this title does not go deeper into history? Parsis *are* the “Jews of India” in terms of intellectual as well as commercial achievements, and perhaps for their religion too. Zoroastrianism enjoined equality between the sexes—an imperative which sharply distinguishes it from other eastern religions. Parsi women tended to be as well educated as Parsi men.

Parsis are renowned for their honesty and their philanthropy—“Parsi, thy name is Charity”—and they have always enjoyed a high moral standing in India. Parsi charity, like Jewish charity, begins at home, and the Zoroastrian religion has always encouraged mutual assistance, but that does not mean they never felt any calling to be the “light of the world”. Critics say Zoroastrians were not interested in proselytising and modern Parsis are still not. Jews have not been interested in proselytising for centuries but at one time they *were* interested in it, and one of them in particular was so good at it that he created Christianity.

The *Gathas* are the foundation of the religion of Zoroaster, venerated since ancient times as shown from the fact that three entire volumes of the original 21 Nasks were devoted to explaining them. Yet the *Gathas* have been described as full of a vision that Ahura Mazda’s revelations were for *all* mankind. We can read:

Now I will speak of the word which the most holy Ahura Mazda has told me as the best for all mankind to hear... (GY 45:5)

What was the Prophet’s point in saying that Ahuras Mazda’s word was for “all mankind”, if he had no desire to set up a universal religion? The philosophy of Zoroaster is unarguably the philosophy of a universal religion. Can we believe that the Persian kings who read this and believed that Ahuramazda was guiding their every step would not consider this of any importance.

Prof A V W Jackson of Columbia long ago told us that the *Gathas* suggested conversion and the tradition is that Zoroaster sent out missionaries. Nor is there a single passage that prohibits the propagation of the religion to others or bars the acceptance of non-Zoroastrians into the religion.

Speak O Wise One with the words of Your mouth for us to know, by the means of which I might convert all the living. (GY 31:3)

The Prophet offers himself as Ahura Mazda's instrument, to enlighten *all the living* about the principles of divine justice, the fight against evil thoughts and deeds, and the choice to follow the path of righteousness. To fight against evil is the great task before mankind. Are we to suppose that the great kings did not believe this?

Modern Zoroastrians, opposed to missionary work and keen to establish this as the prophet's own view, declare that the conversion was only from the path of Evil to the path of Good. Zoroastrian fundamentalists today argue that it does not imply religious conversion. But to any reasonable person it is hard to see how it cannot, if the revelation of Ahuramazda to Zoroaster is the original and purest revelation. These same modern exclusive Zoroastrians must not be allowed to mislead us when it comes to considering the view of the Persians, who were keen to spread the principles of a universal religion even though they were not concerned about the detailed ritual practices or names that were used in different places.

O Mazda, give us the moral courage that we, Your devotees, may spread far and wide Your holy word. (GY 28:7.)

Every devotee of Ahura Mazda, whether king or commoner, prayed to spread His eternal Message of Truth as far and wide as possible, so that the wicked (GY 28:5) may be overpowered (GY 28:6).

While I have power and strength, I shall teach men to seek Asha. (GY 28:4.)

All men should be taught to seek Righteousness.

The satisfaction which Thou shalt give to both factions through Thy pure fire and molten metal O Wise One, is to be given as a sign among living beings, in order to destroy the deceitful and to save the truthful. (GY 51:9)

Every human being will receive signs or signals from Ahuramazda to show whether he is treading the path of Truth or has gone astray on the path of Untruth.

Evil fate is in store for the Untruthful, while Illumination is for him who clings to Truth. (GY 51:8)

Listen with your ears to the best things. Reflect with a clear mind upon the two choices of decision. Being aware, to declare yourselves to Him before the final judgment. (GY 30:2)

Zoroaster gives the "crux of his teaching"—to enjoin all men to choose wisely between the two choices of decision, between Truth and Untruth, Right and Wrong, the Two Spirits of Good and Evil.



Now, in the beginning were these Two Spirits... these Two show themselves as Good and Bad... and of these Two the Wise rightly do choose, but not so the Unwise. (GY 30:3)

In these *Gathas*, Zoroaster does not refer only to the people to whom he addressed himself but to “all people”. He spoke of “what is best for mankind”, and of “living beings”. Ahuramazda’s message was to be spread “far and wide”, so that all can be brought back to the path of Truth.

The freedom of choice that runs throughout the Zarathushtrian scriptures is the moral choice between good and evil, between light and darkness, between truth and falsehood, between righteousness and unrighteousness. Zoroastrianism provides a whole catalogue of commandments, laws, maxims, prescriptions, proscriptions, rules and regulations, as guides to making the right choices.

Professor Mary Boyce can write:

Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the revealed credal religions, and it has probably had more influence on mankind, directly and indirectly, than any other single faith... Today external forces have reduced the Zoroastrians themselves to tiny scattered minorities, living mostly in Iran and India; but beliefs first taught by their prophet are still subscribed to by other peoples throughout the world.

And Duncan Greenlees can add:

Zarathushtra’s mission has completed its task; what he had to give the world has been received by other religions and is now either universally accepted or is being adequately preached by them.

How would it have been possible for this to be true unless some form of evangelism happened? Of course it did, and on a grand and state institutionalized scale.

## **Some Final Thoughts**

In 527 AD, the Church labelled Zarathushtra as the Father of dualism and of all oriental heresies. The Roman Christian Church rejected all rival doctrines of the dualism inherited from Zoroastrianism, and so cut off its roots in the Persian religion. It also shut the neo-Platonist schools because they had the same roots. Now, Zoroaster is scarcely known although all the main patriarchal religions are indebted to him. Fighting French Catharism, it called Zoroaster the great Evil.

When the French king, Philippe le Bel, persecuted the Knights Templar, Zoroaster was again declared the most dreadful Evil on earth. Protestant Churches at the Reformation took the same line as the Catholics, or did not care.

Only when some learned men began to read the Avesta did a little about Zoroastrianism begin to creep into the west. Montesquieu (1689-1755), author of the *Spirit of Laws*, described Zoroaster as a legislator, as did the French translator of the Avesta, Anquetil Duperron (1771). Before the idea of Plato, in his Republic, to have statesmen who are philosophers, Zoroaster taught the importance of having wise sovereigns to govern rightly (GY 28:7, 31:22, 44:9, 46:8, 48:5, 48:11 and 53:2). The good prince adopted and applied the religion of

Zoroaster, and in return could expect favour from Ahuramazda. The good king is liberal and feeds the poor, as was Vishtasp, the protector of Zoroaster.

Aristotle united the Greek philosophy with the oriental religious Systems, as that of the Magians, under the denomination of wisdom (sophia) which is quoted by him as the metaphysical knowledge of the highest principles of theology.

Werner Jaeger

A long time before Plato and Aristotle, Zarathushtra had united God with wisdom and into the nature of the Wise Lord (Ahuramazda) and Good Thought (Vohuman). For Aristotle, to seek the highest principles required divine wisdom known as theosophia and involved every aspect of the philosopher's life. In the Zoroastrian Gathas, knowledge is to transform the disciple, not merely for its own sake.

In Florence during the 15th century AD, Gemistus Plethon, a Byzantine philosopher, saw the connection of Plato with Zoroaster and the patriarchal religions and hoped to unite them into a philosophy of Zoroaster's wisdom through Pythagoras, Plato and the neo-Platonic school. Later, Cardinal Bessarion wrote that as Plato was considered the continuation of Zoroaster 19 centuries before, so Gemistus Plethon was the continuation of them both, but Gemistus Plethon's works were considered sacrilegious.

Zoroaster showed that human laws will no more be dictated by anthropomorphic gods through ritualistic superstitions, but described a universal ethic, based on the worship of Truth (Arta) and on the new pre-eminence of wisdom (Ahuramazda) seen by him as a perfect archetype above humanity.

Zoroaster looked for a personal deep transformation of man, not compelled but from a profound personal ethical choice, to build a deeper and wider selection of ever better thoughts, words, and deeds.

Later religions founded on Zoroastrianism—Magianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam—diluted the original message because it was easier to stick to familiar rites, mechanically repeated to please God, than to follow the difficult way of Zoroaster.

The ethic of the Gatha is minimally ritualistic. The only sacrifice required is that of good deeds. Only through our thoughts, words and deeds do we prepare our after-life destiny. Our daena or welcoming spirit becomes ugly or beautiful according to our life deeds.

The Greek tradition was of Zoroaster being vegetarian. Herodotus and Xenophon (*Cyropedia*) testify that the daily food of Persians was bread, cress and water. Porphyry confirms that among the Magi eating of meat was sternly controlled:

The highest class and the wisest do not eat meat nor kill any living being and abstain as well from sex.  
(*De Abstinencia* IV 16)

Sotio and Clement of Alexandria corroborate and extend the same restriction to all the Magi:

They dress in white clothes, sleep on straw and feed on vegetables, cheese and black bread.

In Sassanian times eating beef and mutton on certain days was prohibited. Denkart and Bundahishn predict that human beings will become vegetarians before feeding only on water, itself preceding the spiritual food of the last times (*Dk* 7; *Bdh* 30). It suggests that Zoroaster might have condemned the sacrifice of oxen, but it was such a popular tradition among the Aryan religion of the kavi and the karapan that it was never stopped.

Abstinence of cattle meat goes with the expansion of agriculture which is blessed in the Avesta where the best blessing of Ahura Mazda is a good crop, especially of wheat and barley, and nowhere do we find cattle-breeding praised. Zoroastrians saw the Arab and Turkish people as Zarathushtra saw the Turanians because of their herds destroying the fields, gardens and irrigation canals.

The Greeks were amazed to notice how the Persians were attached to telling the truth and avoiding lies. Now, lying and hypocrisy are permanent sins in our modern world: in business, advertising, politics.

Voltaire wrote that the best expression of morality he had ever known stands in this Zoroastrian precept of the Saddar. "When you are not sure if an action is right or wrong, just abstain from doing it".

In a final thought, Professor Paul DuBreuil concludes that Zarathushtra's wish was to see the whole universe following the law of Ahuramazda.

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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 2. How Persia Created Judaism

### A World State

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#### Persian History

The Medes and Persians had roamed slowly over several hundred years from the steppes to the Iranian plateau but they had been preceded 1000 years before by earlier bands of Aryans who had found an opportunity to advance into the near east when the Sumerian Empire staggered just before Hammurabi, the Amorite, steadied the central power in Mesopotamia about 1700 BC. When this power then collapsed the Aryans wasted no time in advancing further.

The empires of Sumer and Akkad did not stretch politically to India but culturally they did to judge by artefacts found in the Indus valley. Strong states in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates apparently extended a benign cultural stability to the east also. Their collapse therefore left a large gap vulnerable to the invaders from the north and east. Eventually the Kassites grew and spanned the Hittites, also Indo-European invaders.

Before the start of the last millennium BC, the Phrygians, Armenians, Thracians and Mycenaean Greeks had invaded the Aegean area and Asia Minor and eroded the Hittite empire. Like the Medes and Persians, the Greeks and the Philistines, all of these were Indo-Europeans. The Greeks knew of the Medes and Persians at an early date and they both appear in Greek mythology as Perseus and Medea.

Conceivably these Indo-European tribes were part of the same invasion, perhaps through the Caucasus to Anatolia where the Greeks moved west while the Medes and Persians moved east. In myth, Medea is associated with Colchis at the end of the Black Sea, in the Caucasus. Her uncle is Perses, mythical founder of the Persian nation, and her son, the mythical founder of the Medes, is Medus. Perseus cuts off the head of Medusa and fathers Perses by Andromeda.

In the early centuries of the last millennium BC the Semitic Assyrians under their clever and aggressive military leaders began to set up a universal state centred in Mesopotamia. The Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III, first mentions Parsua when recording his campaigns on his black obelisk of 843 BC. Shalmaneser also ravaged Mahi Dasht extracting tribute from 27 Persian chiefs as far as the land of the Medes.

The Assyrians linked together the Parsuans, the Medes and the Mannaeans suggesting that all were in the region of modern Iranian Kurdistan. Parsua was the next country to the east of Assyria in a line between Nineveh and Egbatana. The Medes were further away on the Iranian plateau up to the salt desert. The Medes were considered the more dangerous to the Assyrians and are mentioned constantly in records at the time of Ashurbanipal (668-627 BC).

The basis of the economy on the Iranian plateau at the beginning of the first millennium BC was the class of small landowners and stockholders who grew crops and reared horses and cattle (GHIRS-I). The social system was similar to that in Greece described by Homer. Barons or princes held single towns or small regions and

ruled some nobles, some land-owning free men, some landless free men and some slaves.

These barons were forced to pay tribute to the Assyrians, whose records suggest that the Parsuans were a static population in the ninth and eighth centuries. The core culture of the Mesopotamian peoples was common, and this long static period as neighbours of the Assyrians would explain why Persians were not ignorant strangers or wild savages. They were familiar with the culture that they had been adjacent to for hundreds of years and became its descendants. Sometime in the 200 years after Shalmaneser III, the Persians migrated south east along the valleys of the Zagros Mountains until they settled in the ancient area called Elam. The decline of the Assyrians facilitated this move.

The eastern Medes remained free of Assyria and set up their own kingdom in 711 BC, under Huakhshathra Daiukku—Uaksatar to the Assyrians and Deioces to the Greeks. Sargon II (721-705 BC) had Daiukku transported to Syria as punishment for helping the king of Urartu (Ararat). Persian art, architecture and irrigation suggests at some stage they were subject to, or allies of, the kingdom of Urartu (Ararat), to the north of Assyria in the region of Lake Van. Urartian craftsmen seem to have sheltered in Media and influenced arts in the new kingdom. Another view is that a relative of Daiukku sought a confederacy with the eastern Medes, as a result of the punishment of his family, and this became the Median kingdom.

Sennacherib (692 BC) forced an alliance which included Parsua with other allies from around Elam, implying that Parsua was also in that area much nearer the gulf. Another of the allies was Anshan, the country that Cyrus the Great tells us his ancestors ruled, and a Kurash (Cyrus), king of Anshan, appears in the Assyrian records for 640 BC. Since Anshan was ruled by the kings of Elam until 692 BC, it looks as though the country of Anshan was obliged to be yielded up to the Persians who moved bodily from Parsua to Anshan renaming the land Pars (Fars). It looks almost like another Assyrian deportation, but deportations were of troublesome populations not allies, so we have to assume that the Persians continued their migration. The alternative is that Persians had settled in several different areas.

The desiccated Iranian plateau might not look too attractive compared with well watered valleys to either side, but Iranian princes owned the copper, iron and lapis lazuli mines and protected the Semitic merchants who plied the caravan routes to the east. The ancient center of Zoroastrianism seems to have been Bactria, a source of lapis lazuli, much valued by the Assyrians. The Medes controlled trade from the east through their town of Ragha, on their eastern border where caravans from east and west met to exchange and barter. The merchants traded in expensive goods like gold, silver, precious stones and rich clothes, so the princes who charged them for protection in crossing their lands were not badly off.

It is along this trade route that Zoroastrianism came west. Ragha was the center of dispersion of Zoroastrianism among the Medes, a fact that led to the belief that Zoroastrianism had been born there. It became a sort of Zoroastrian Mecca, Rome or Canterbury.

The extension of the skills of iron tool making and the associated demand in the eighth century gave southern Iran particularly an economic boost that contributed to the growth of Persian power. The Persians had the iron ore and gained the smelting and ironworking skills but important too was the value of readily available iron tools for cultivating the plateau and improving its productivity. The copper mines however remained important because iron did not immediately displace bronze and copper was preferred for everyday utensils and

ornaments for a long time.

The Assyrians noted the plateau both as a potential danger and as a source of iron, copper and horses, and raided Iranian towns often, but usually the people had warning enough to take to the hills. When the Assyrians had taken what they wanted and departed, the people returned, rebuilt and carried on with life. The Assyrians, like the Egyptians, would boast on their stelae that a town had been razed and left lifeless, but it was rarely true. And, the Iranians would resist, if they thought their chances were favourable. Their cavalry tactics were novel and effective, especially against the foot soldiers and chariots of the Assyrians in countryside too rugged for chariots. The Assyrians learnt about cavalry from the Persians and adapted just as the Han emperors of China had to learn from the mounted Huns and adapt to them.

The Achaemenids from the outset showed that they were experts in human psychology. They had moved through the country of the Elamites to settle in Anshan but seem not to have raised any animosity from them. The Elamite kingdom itself with its capital at Susa remained independent, but its decline gave the Persians a constant supply of educated servants for long afterwards as scribes, administrators and bureaucrats in the chancellery and royal palaces. The Elamites were an old and civilized nation, and the Achaemenids seem to have gained their support by giving them the impression that they were restoring their old kingdom. The Persians for everyday and for state occasions took to wearing the long flowing robes of the Elamites rather than the trousers and short tight tunic of the horseman. When attacked by the Assyrians the Elamite Kingdom sought assistance from the tougher Persians.

The second king of the eastern Medes however subjected the Persians about 700 BC, and ruled their cousins for about 100 years influencing them greatly. The king, Khshathrita, formed an alliance against the Assyrians with the Mannaeans, an Iranian tribe near the Caspian Sea, and the Scythians who rode in to plunder the area often. But Esarhaddon subjugated the Medes again in 672 BC.

Khshathrita was killed fighting the Assyrians and another Huakhshathra (Cyaxeres to the Greeks) succeeded him, and reorganized the army. Ashurbanipal (668-627 BC) had come to power in Assyria and punished the western Medes again, boasting of destroying 75 towns. Later in his reign he wasted Elam permanently, effectively leaving it to revive as Persia, which he did not attack, placated by the diplomacy of Kurash who thought it was wise to donate large gifts to the Assyrian royal house.

When Ashurbanipal died, Cyaxares took his chance to ally with the Babylonians, Scythians and subject Medes against Assyria, and laid waste Ashur in 614 BC. In 612 BC, Nineveh and Nimrod fell, and in 610 BC, Harran too, and Assyria had gone for good. But the savage Scythians took over the kingdom of Urartu, devastated by the Assyrians, and used it as a base for plundering everywhere around for 28 years. From 590 BC, for five years, the Scythians and Lydians allied against the Medes, but eventually lost. The Scythians were driven back across the Caucasus and the Lydians were forced to accept the Halys river as the border with Media. The Medes had now replaced the Assyrians as the northern power in Mesopotamia. Urartu and Cappadocia were now in Media.

Cyaxeres was succeeded by Astyages (Greek. Ishtuwegu, Babylonian). Herodotus said Astyages ruled all of Asia beyond the Halys, and it might have been true as far as Bactria or at least a substantial way along the highway east from Ragha. Whoever ruled Media and Persia later seemed automatically to have control of the



east as far as India, so it is a reasonable conclusion that Astyages ruled Zoroastrian people.

## A World State and Religion

The Aramaean culture of Syria, at the beginning of the first millennium BC, was merging with the more warlike countries to the east, first the Assyrians and Babylonians, then the Persians and Scythians to form a world state with Aramaic as its language. By the eighth century BC, the Assyrians controlled the area. The spoken language of the Assyrian court and its bureaucracy was Aramaic—the *lingua franca* of the ancient near east.

The reasons for the spread of the Aramaic language were not only the expansion of the Aramaeans themselves into the Fertile Crescent, about the beginning of the first millennium BC. It coincided with the political expansion of the Assyrian Empire, with the consequent mixture of the political term “Assyrian” and the linguistic term “Aramaic speaker”. The Assyrian state had a policy of transferring populations, notably in the eighth century BC under Sargon II and Tiglath-Pileser III. Many defeated and captured people were moved, and Assyrians were also settled as colonists all over the ancient near east within the Assyrian hegemony. The use of the term “Assyrian” for “Aramaean” is even found in the sixth century AD when the Talmudic rabbis speak of their Aramaic alphabet as “Ashuri”.

The Aramaic language spoken and written all over the ANE came to be called Syriac in the West or Assyrian (Asori) in the East. In the second century AD, the satirist, Lucian of Samosata (in Syria), wrote a book in Greek, *De Syria Dea* (*The Syrian Goddess*). Lucian calls the people of Syria by the term Assyrian, and vice versa:

I who write am Assyrian.

He came to Syria, but the people beyond the Euphrates did not receive him.

The Greeks considered Aramaic as the Syrian language and called those who spoke it Syrians. The biblical “Aram” is Greek and Roman “Syria”. Aramaean speakers were Syrians, and later they seem often to have been identified with the Jews. Macrobius, a writer of the 5th century AD, and a pagan, wrote a book called *Saturnalia* which recalled a cult in which the Assyrii (Syrians) dedicated offerings to the sun in the village of Heliopolis (modern Baalbek). The Armenian author, Moses of Chorene, has “Asori” as a synonym of “Chaldaean” meaning Aramaean. Michael the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch (1166-99) says the Syriac language, Aramaic, is from Edessa (Urfa).

Dom Gregory Dix, in *Jew and Greek*, refers to Syrian culture and sees it as the source of ancient near eastern religion. He says that only two of the great “spiritual” religions of today, Confucianism and Buddhism, began outside of “Syriac” culture. He means by this Assyrian. He continues that the Persians were “heirs by adoption of the Syriac culture”. The Syriac culture was the Assyrian culture, and the language they spoke was Aramaean. The Persians were greatly influenced by the centuries they were in contact with the Assyrians but only adopted the Aramaean language about half way through the lifetime of their great empire, and not any Aramaean religion. Cyrus had his religion at the outset.

The general historical trend to the world state was not altered by the change of central power when the Persians became leaders after the Mesopotamians. The Persians had been students of the Assyrians in the several hundred years that they had taken to move into Iran, and they or their allies the Indo-European Scythians had

been mercenaries of the Assyrians. The refined culture and science of the long established civilisations of Syria and Mesopotamia merged with the vigour and technical innovations of the warlike Aryan invaders from the north. Dix writes that Zoroastrianism, Mithraism and the solar monotheism of Akhenaten “appear” to have been born under Syriac influence. Perhaps they would “appear” thus to a Catholic monk, who believed the myths of Moses, but “appear” betrays nothing other than an opinion. When the myths of the Jewish scriptures are recognized as fiction then Judaism can no longer rival Zoroastrianism in antiquity and proper priorities can be established.

A world state was the way of enforcing stability and was obviously welcomed by most people, but especially trading peoples and those making specialized products for trade. Besides the use of military and administrative means of control, such empires depended on the propagation of a universal religion. The Assyrian universal state that the Persians took over, with the brief interlude of Babylon, had a god called Ashur (Asshur, Assur) who was depicted as a man rising from a winged solar disc and shooting a bow or offering a ring, often thought to be a diadem or coronet but probably symbolising a bond (like a wedding ring) or covenant such as we find often in the Hebrew scriptures. The Persian god, Ahuramazda, was depicted in a similar way as a man rising head and shoulders above a solar disc also offering a ring, or sometimes apparently a blessing.

*Ahura* is the Persian rendering of Vedic *asura* which is uncommonly like *Ashur*, though the Assyrian language was Semitic. J H Moulton, who knew something about these things, agreed with Dr Martin Gemoll who proposed in 1911 that Ahuramazda was the same god as Ashur.

John A Tvedtnes, in an article in *J Near Eastern Studies* 40 (1981) rejected the long-accepted statement of Herodotus (*Histories* 7.63) that “Syrian” was the Greek way of saying “Assyrian”. Tvedtnes proposed that Syria is derived from Hurri, an old Egyptian word for the Hurrians, which in Coptic would have changed to Suri. Richard N Frye says the vocalization of the word Syria and the supposed Middle Egyptian word “Suri” do not favour the hypothesis.

Both Tvedtnes and Frye can be right in a sense if Syrian equates with Assyrian as Herodotus says but both of them are at source the same as Hurrian. The Greeks first used the term Syrian at the beginning of the seventh century BC for the people of Cilicia and Cappadocia. Herodotus says that Syrians are called Cappadocians by the Persians. Cappadocia is in Anatolia not Assyria or Syria. It is the centre of the area settled by the tribes called Hurrians who were the same race as the Mitanni whose brief empire was centred in Syria, near Harran. There seems probable philological connexions between Assyria, Syria, Surya (Indic sun), Assur, Asura, Ahura, Hurri and biblical Horites and Hivites. All might be connected with the sun or brightness, and Lordship, and perhaps hills and highlands, sun worship being often conducted in high places.

The solar nature of the disc is clear in the picture of Ashur offering the ring but, in the picture of him with a bow and in the picture of Ahuramazda, the ring is plainly a symbolic girdle, presumably the equivalent of the Zoroastrian Kusti girdle. Did Assyrians have the same custom of wearing a girdle as the Persians? A tasselled cord is plain on their depictions of people. Ahuramazda is said to wear the heavens as his Kusti girdle and in the depictions of him it will be the circle of the ecliptic, the circle of the zodiac. Since the Indians also wear a sacred cord, it seems that the Assyrians had adopted Aryan customs, presumably from an earlier Aryan invasion—perhaps the Hurrians or Mitanni.

Already in the first century of the second millennium BC, the kings of Assyria were being called Ashur and were

adopting the bow and arrows as a sign of office and the handed-over-ring as a sign of favour by gods and goddesses. A god called “Assara Mazas” has been noted in Assyrian lists of gods. Mazda appears in the names of Medes from about 700 BC.

Ashurbanipal took the hands of Sin and Ninku at Harran, according to a royal inscription. It echoes the practice of the monarch taking the hand of Bel Marduk at the Babylonian new years ceremonies and copied by Cyrus. These observations hint at syncretic tendencies in these religions, and it is interesting to speculate whether Bel-Marduk, the god of Babylon, had also begun to take on universal characteristics at this time.

Cyrus accused the king of Babylon of neglecting Marduk, the *great universal god*. Of course, Cyrus was intent on giving universal qualities to all of the principle gods of his conquests, and this was perhaps merely the start of it for Marduk, but the earlier Babylonian kings might have seen Marduk in a similar light. Berosus says Medes ruled Babylon for up to 200 years giving some credence to the idea, but Berosus was not reliable in his lists of kings.

The Assyrians, in the west, at any rate, seemed to regard Sin as a universal god. S W Holloway claims the “locally manufactured glyptics symbolizing the cult of Sin at Harran proliferated in the western arm of the Fertile Crescent” showing that the Assyrians must have been promoting the spread of the cult.

It is historically probable that the spread of the moon god cult of Harran by Assyria was a self-conscious act of imperial statecraft, designed to foster the acceptance of a cult whose pantheon was understood as protecting and legitimizing Assyrian interests in the West...

The equivalent of the cross, Constantine’s “in hoc signo vinces” for the Assyrian kings in the West was the lunar crescent of the moon god.

This lunar crescent symbol had been found by 1993 at fourteen stratified sites in Palestine and Transjordan—at Hazor, Tell Kosan, Tell es Samak, Megiddo and Tell Doshan, Samaria, Gezer, Tell en Nasbeh, Tell Jemmah, Horbat Uzza, Nebo and Taliwan. An unstratified example of a seal stamp was found at Gezer, showing a lunar crescent and a pendant star, datable by eponym to 649 BC and declared as belonging to Netanyahu, a name indicating the god Yehouah.

Religion was used for political purposes by ancient kings in the near east. Indeed, that probably is its purpose!

In reorganizing the cult, the king sought to bring the total life of the nation under the domain of the national deity. The king built a temple for the nation’s god and constructed a palace for himself as the god’s earthly regent. He established sanctuaries as cultic and administrative centers and created other structures for storage and security. He appointed private and other civil servants to implement royal policy, and deployed military personnel. He fixed the religious calendar and fulfilled the cultic duties of the head of state. Thus “religion was an arm of royal administration”.

Carl D Evans here summarises, in a few sentences, Gosta Ahlström’s *Royal Administration and National Administration in Ancient Palestine*, ending with a quotation from it that epitomizes the work and what should have been obvious to all historians. Yet, Steven W Holloway who has carefully studied the Assyrian cults in a biblical connexion declares that the Assyrian foreign service were not interested in the cultic practices of their vassals and their provinces, unless they might have political consequences.

Since it would be hard to know whether there was a political implication in cultic practices without first taking an interest in them, we can assume that they were interested in them all, initially, and only lost interest in those that offered no likely challenges. The Urartians or Chaldeans in the hills to the north of the Assyrian steppes had shown they were a danger to the Assyrians who accordingly had a keen interest in stopping the Chaldeans from using their temple to their god Chaldi at Musasir. A puppet king Urzana was appointed to Musasir with instructions not to let the officials and the king of Urartu use the temple.

Richard Frye of Harvard (*The Heritage of Persia*;) thought the Persian kings had a concept of “One World” and the “fusion of all people and cultures” in one “Oecumen” was their important legacy, inherited by Alexander, the Romans and the Arabs. In ancient times “culture” essentially was religion.

### **Pacification by Transportation**

Transportation of populations has long been used for pacification. In Egypt, at the time of Amenhotep II (1453-1419 BC) and Thutmose IV (1419-1386 BC), these pharaohs deported about 80,000 Canaanites, many from Gezer. Amenhotep III (1386-1349 BC) fortified Gezer and other cities in Palestine to hold the royal garrisons. He provided these cities with fine temples and palaces. The Canaanites will have been moved to outposts in Nubia or Libya, and Nubians or Libyans were probably moved into Canaan. So, the leaders of the native populations were removed and others were transported in to replace them.

In the eighth century, the Assyrians had a warrior leader, Tiglath-Pileser III, who proved to be a great pacifier of troublesome populations. His policy was to set up colonies, claiming to be saving the colonized people, then to deport the leading elements of a colony to another colony elsewhere. Thus the bulk of the population left behind were leaderless and lacked necessary skilled people and the clever and perhaps dangerous people who were uprooted were planted hundreds of miles away in the midst of a hostile population. Thus 65,000 Medes were deported to Diyala near modern Baghdad and were replaced by Aramaeans.

In Israel, Tiglath-Pileser deposed the native king and replaced him with a vassal called Saviour or Salvation (Hosea), proof that the action of the invader was presented as a deliverance (2 *Kg* 15:29-30). 2 *Kings* 17:3 tells us that later Hosea was paying tribute to Shalmaneser but eventually sought an alliance with Egypt and was deposed by the Assyrian king. When Sargon (Sharru-Kin) II captured Samaria (biblical Israel) he implemented the policy of transportation, moving 30,000 Israelites to other parts of the empire, some of them to Halah near Haran and Habor on the upper Euphrates, others to Rhages near Teheran, the “cities of the Medes” of 2 *Kings*. He replaced them with people transported in from Cuthah in Babylonia and Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim in Syria. These people incur the anger of the writer of 2 *Kings* for worshipping their own gods, despite them also taking up the worship of the native god, Yehouah. It seems a safe guess that the displaced ruling class of Israel did the same in the lands in which they settled in the Assyrian plains and Syria. They will therefore have taken up the worship of Ashur, who was the god of the earlier race of Indo-Europeans that ruled in Assyria. This might be why an apparently Semitic people, the Assyrians, seemed to worship a god of the Aryans, similar to Ahuramazda.

The Median prince Daiukku, called by Herodotus, Deioces, possibly founder of the kingdom of the Medes, was deported with his extended family to Syria. The tribes of the Medes were called “Bit” so-and-so, meaning the

house of so-and-so, like the Semitic habit (“beth”, “beit”), so the House of Deioces was lost just as the ten houses of Israel were supposedly lost.

New waves of Indo-Europeans were crossing the Caucasus—the Cimmerians and the Scythians who lived by plunder. The Cimmerians entered Asia Minor and ended the kingdom of the Phrygians led by king Midas. However Ashurbanipal defeated and dispersed them into the general horde of Scythian invaders. These new bandits from the north promised to ally with the Medes to attack Nineveh but took advantage of the absence of the Median king to take over his country, which was then ruled by Scythians for possibly 30 years.

Using Media as a base the Scythians attacked Assyria, then rampaged on through Syria and Palestine, stopping at Egypt only because they were offered a lot of gold to go away. Biblical scholars like to think Jeremiah’s description (*Jer* 4:13) of chariots like whirlwinds and horses swifter than eagles refers specifically to the Scythians, but Jeremiah speaks only of the north, which is where any such danger to Palestine would be, and he is a poet of considerable imaginative invention. His is probably a poetic description of any fearful invader from the north, Yehouah wanted to inflict on His Chosen, but particularly suits the Scythians.

Graves, dated to later than the eighth century BC, are found in Luristan in the south of the Iranian plateau that are of keen horsemen because everything found in them is portable and much of the ornamentation of the graves were bronze bits and other accoutrements of horses. Furthermore, there is no sign of any towns in the same place that could correspond to these evidently nomadic people.

Among the grave relics are depictions of a goddess and a god rather like Ahuramazda. Perhaps the goddess was Anahita (Aramaiti?) who was later known to have been revered by Persians but perhaps was at the beginning too. The subjects of the artwork are remarkably cosmopolitan, including pictures typical of Assyria, Babylonia, Syria and Asia Minor. Belt plaques look typically Scythian. The cultural mix is what might be expected of the Scythians that had crossed the Caucasus, plundered and raided various peoples, and mixed with the Indo-European stock already present, the Medes and Persians.

Cyaxares, the Median leader, learnt the skills of the Scythians, threw off their yoke and started conquests of his own. The Assyrians had exhausted themselves with constant warfare over several centuries. Cyaxares allied with the Babylonians to defeat them and their Scythian mercenaries, and in 612 BC, Assyria disappeared from history as a world power. The authors of *Ezekiel* and *Jeremiah*, writing long after the event make their heroes “prophesy” that Assyria would be defeated by the Medes and sure enough it was!

The state of Urartu submitted to the Medes about the same time, and Lydia about 590 BC. The kings of the Medes had evidently already subdued the states to the east so their empire stretched from Anatolia almost to India with only Babylonia standing free in between.

### **Cyrus the Great (559-530 BC)**

Dom Gregory Dix says that Herodotus recognized the sudden rise to empire of the Persians under Cyrus in 550 BC as the turning point of *Greek* history. *Second Isaiah* saw him as God’s saviour of the *world!* If God’s chief prophet and the world’s first historian tell us that Cyrus was so important, why do modern theologians and modern historians ignore the man?

Cyrus recognized the importance of the older civilizations and wished to unite them in a world empire.

G M Cook

The Persians arrived in Parsumash, traditionally known as Anshan, sometime around 700 BC and Achaemenes founded a small kingdom nominally subject to Elam, an old country in terminal decline. Assyria had forced its choice of rulers on to the Elamites and the country was thoroughly divided between pro-Assyrian and anti-Assyrian factions. While the Scythians ruled Media, Achaemenes' son, Teispes (Chishpish), took over the province of Fars or Parsa. Teispes was a diplomat and avoided the imbroglios of the great powers, but when he died, he divided his kingdom between his two sons. A gold tablet found at Egbatana, where it must have been taken with Achaemenid archives during the empire, says:

This land of the Persians which I possess, provided with fine horses and good men, was given to me by the Great God Ahuramazda. I am the king of this land.

The parallel between the Persians migrating landless for a long time then being delivered by the grace of God into a wonderful land and the mythical journey of the Israelites into their land of milk and honey should not be missed. Both have the sound of deportation propaganda. Ariaramses (640-590 BC) one of the sons of Teispes, was the author. This is the earliest mention of Ahuramazda (later, Ormuzd).

Ultimately the two branches were to be united again under the more vigorous of the Achaemenid kings though there seemed to have been no bad feeling, the subject branch carrying on as governors of what was their own country, an early example of the generosity of the Achaemenids towards losers and perhaps the influence of the Zoroastrian religion.

In Zoroastrian mythology, the king converted by Zoroaster, Vistaspa, convinced now of the support of the Good God and committed to defeating the followers of the Evil Spirit—anyone who refused to submit—set out on the “Wars of Religion”. The blessing of Ahuramazda or perhaps the novelty of fanaticism kept the Zoroastrians winning. There is no historical record of any of this, unless they are stylised versions of the victories of Cyrus, but set down in the annals, they were to be an inspiration to religious maniacs for millennia.

The Zoroastrian tradition suggested by Vishtaspa's “Wars of Religion” enjoined on the Persian monarchs an enthusiasm for Holy Wars. It glorified the dissemination of Zoroastrianism by the sword, and the Arabs later took their cue from it, as the founder of the Persian empire Cyrus (Kurash) the Great did immediately. Herodotus confirms that his epithet was justified—he was a noble king.

Historically, Cyrus the Great became a Zoroastrian at some time in his career, for at his death Zoroastrianism was the official religion of his empire, and the Magi had attained the monopoly of religion. It was the proper religion of the Medes and Persians, so that being a Zoroastrian meant being a Persian. The two became equivalent, religion and ethnicity being identified, as they later did in Judaism.

As a devoted Zoroastrian, Cyrus believed that his religious duty was to bring about the eschatological promises of Zoroastrianism through active warfare. If the universe was an epic struggle between the forces of Ahuramazda and the forces of evil, Cyrus saw his job as personally bringing about the victory of his god. As an



extension of this, Cyrus would bring Zoroastrianism to all the peoples he conquered, but not by forcing them. Zoroastrianism recognized all the gods of other people—some were of Ahuramazda's Good Creation, and some were of Ahriman's Evil Creation. Cyrus distinguished between them on the basis of the resistance the worshippers of the god offered him.

A scholarly Parsi, Ruhi Muhsen Afnan (*Zoroaster's Influence on Anaxagoras, the Greek Tragedians, and Socrates*, New York, 1969)), shows that expansion of the Persian Empire under the Achaemenids was motivated by a "divine mission to offer mankind" a true belief, like the wars of Islam. These wars "were dominated by a religious fervor that must be taken into account" in the sudden emergence of Persia, just as the Arabs suddenly emerged with a divine militancy and conquered most of the world.

He first refused to bow to the Medes and carefully planned to defeat them, thus merging the two strong Indo-European tribes of the plateau. Typically, he treated the defeated median king, Astyages, with generosity. Defeating the Medes gave him a ready made empire from Asia Minor to the Caspian Sea, with Babylonia ruling to the south. He moved his capital immediately from Persis to Egbatana, taking the royal archives with him.

Asia Minor, including the Ionian Greek cities, were subject to the wealthy kingdom of Lydia ruled by the legendary Croesus. Croesus was too rich and proud to bow to the upstart so was defeated in battle and had to yield to the new power in the near east. The Greek cities saw this as a chance of independence and also refused homage and were duly individually beaten or bribed into submission. Miletus was the only city to yield readily, and must have had some privileges as a reward. Herodotus notes the name Oromedan, a citizen of Cilicia about 540 BC, just about the time Cyrus subjected Anatolia. Oromedan is a Greek rendering of Ahuramazda.

So, from the earliest days of the Persian empire, Greeks were a part of it. They were soldiers, merchants and entrepreneurs and were vital to this very young country from its coming out into the world. It is childish school learning that depicts the Greeks as defenders of teutonic Europe against the Asian hordes. Greeks were serving in the armies of the Persians, and not just as infantry—as generals too.

Cyrus turned east to secure his boundaries there, facing India and particularly the north east where armed bands from central Asia liked to gallop in to plunder. In each case of conquest, Cyrus allowed the defeated country to continue with its normal culture and practices, and left most of the officials in post. He knew he did not have enough trained men to administer all his conquered territories. It was a dangerous but necessary policy. Meanwhile he founded a college of seven Persian princes and later many more Persian nobles would be trained for colonial administration.

Cyrus was always astute enough to realize that most people he was conquering were far more cultured than his own, and made no attempt to impose a Persian "culture" nor was he interested in directly forcing the Persian religion on to others. He thought, though, that the universal god, Ahuramazda, was favouring him, his house and the Persian nation, and he was keen that people should see some god as universal so that the idea of a universal god would confer legitimacy on the idea of a universal king of kings on earth.

Cyrus still had a strong and rich country independent at the centre of his empire and decided it had to be made to submit. The [Chaldeans](#) were a Semitic people who invaded Southern Babylonia in the early centuries of the first millennium BC, while the Aramaeans occupied Syria. Chaldaea is first mentioned in the annals of the

Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC). When they ruled Babylonia, after the Assyrians, they followed the practice of their predecessors, pacifying people by deportation including part of the Jewish population, supposedly 10,000 nobles and craftsmen. It is doubtful that many, if any, of these people or their descendants willingly returned to Palestine, but the people who themselves were deported into Palestine by the Persians, a hundred or so years later, were nevertheless called the “Returners from Exile”.

Cyrus returned from the east in 539 BC determined to settle the Chaldaean question. Nabonidus (Nabunaid) (555-539 BC), was apparently a cultured but loopy king, interested in the worship of the god, Sin—neglecting Babylon’s principal god, Marduk, who symbolized the city as well as the faith of its people—and in archaeological research, and quite uninterested in warfare, which he left to his son, Belshazzar. Cyrus had a large army with Medes and Persians at the core but lots of soldiers of conquered nations in support. He needed no army. Babylon submitted and only a few days of token resistance came from the guard of the royal compound. As ever, Cyrus was generous to the defeated king and his family, but Nabonidus died a year later anyway. Cyrus joined in the public mourning.

The victory over Babylonia expressed all the facets of the policy of conciliation which Cyrus had followed until then. He presented himself not as a conqueror, but a liberator and the legitimate successor to the crown. He took the title of “King of Babylon, King of the Land”.

Cyrus made cylinder seals and inscribed tablets with declarations of his treatment of and welcome by the Babylonians. He entered Babylon “amidst exulting shouts”. His victory was “desired to the joy of their hearts” and “him did they bless with joy”. Then, “Marduk the great Lord made the honourable hearts of the people of Babylon inclined towards me because I was daily mindful of his worship” “the inhabitants realized the satisfaction of their hearts desires” and “their sighs I hushed, their anger I appeased”.

If Cyrus said all of this regarding Marduk and the Babylonians, it is credible that a similar tactic should have been employed in respect of the Jews, and indeed many other people, the evidence of which is now lost. Cyrus claimed to have been visited in a dream by Yehouah, a god of the Hebrews, the people who lived in “Beyond the River”, the Assyrian province of “Eber-niri” (Persian “Abarnahara”). Yehouah declared he was of the Good Creation and asked to be worshipped in the land of Yehud. The Jewish scriptures, not an unbiased source, tells us that Cyrus sent the “Returners from Exile” there to introduce the proper worship of Yehouah in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Thus saith Yehouah to his messiah, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates, and the gates shall not be shut.

*Isaiah 45:1*

Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, Yehouah Elohim of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

*Ezra 1:2*

“Yehouah Elohim of heaven” means “Yehouah of the gods of heaven” not “The Lord God of heaven” as the dishonest translators will put it. For Indo-Europeans, the gods of heaven are the Daevas, the wicked gods

derogated by Zoroaster. It seems the Persians saw all national gods as Daevas, but were ready to allow their worshippers to show by their deeds that they were really Yazatas, good spirits.

In fact no one, or very few volunteers went there and later kings were obliged to send deportees to shore up Jerusalem as a citadel against the Egyptians. It was set up as a temple City in which the people, a Nation of Priests, were privileged in return for their loyalty.

The Reverend Mills recognized that ancient politicians were sensible of propaganda. He comments on the propaganda of Cyrus: "All this piety was of course political" but still showed the Persian king as a man of faith. When Cyrus flooded the empire with these cylinder seals and inscriptions, he knew that they would be read by the literate and repeated by story tellers for a long time. He knew they would become the stuff of legends. Mills observes:

The empire was as complex in its religious types as it was vast in extent, and the amount of business entailed in administering it must have been phenomenal.

Beyond a question there existed a "Ministry of Public Worship".



**Rock face at Behistun showing the monumental inscription of Darius the Great**

The objective of this ministry was to make a show of restoring gods and temples to please the peoples of the nations, but it is utterly naïve to imagine that the "restoration" had no strings attached or was simply restoration of an ancient worship rather than its "improvement" in the sense of arranging it in a form more conducive to civil obedience. No subtle king could miss the chance to cast the restoration in a direction favourable to himself. As Mills says:

These Achaemenids were men of business and practical to the finest point.

Darius took the same line but was more keen on monumental inscriptions than Cyrus. His main legacy is the immense carved cliff face at Behistun but other inscriptions are at Persepolis, Naksh-e Rostam, Elvend, Kerman, Susa, Suez, Van and Egbatana, as well as on seals, tablets, pillars, weights and vases. Mills points out that “what the great Iranian inscriptions said, all officers of the king's government must have known”.

### **Cyrus the Deliverer of Oppressed Peoples**

The interesting thing was that Cyrus offered himself to the Babylonians as a deliverer or Saviour (in Greek, Soter), just as he did to the Jews. He said Babylon's god, Marduk-Bel, had chosen him, Cyrus, as a righteous king who would rule the world. To prove it he ritually took the god's hand at the new year festivities, thus legitimising him in the official title of the Babylonian king—“king of the land” of Babylon. Marduk-Bel was offered to his own worshippers in a new light—as a god with a world outlook not merely a local one.

Cyrus told the Babylonians that earlier kings, like Nabonidus, had taken their gods from their rightful homes and he promised to “restore” them. Nabonidus had used exactly the same approach in Harran when he persuaded the people he deported to the town that the proper god of the city was Sin. Even then the policy was not new. An inscription of Hammurabi who rules in Babylon from 1792 to 1750 BC speaks of him restoring to its rightful place the god who favoured the city of Assur.

Persians called Cyrus “Father”, Greeks “Lord” or “Master”, and “Law-Giver”, and Jews called him “Messiah”. Greek writers like Aeschylus depict the Persian king as a god, and Curtius Rufus has a sycophant encouraging Alexander the Great to accept divine honours by assuring him the Persians had worshipped their kings among the gods. It was not true. They did not and no Persian king claimed to be a god, but they did like to depict themselves as god-like. They showed themselves larger than men and, as it were, conversing with God. They were God's regent on earth, and if that meant some people thought they were an angel of God, doubtless they would be hardly likely to send an envoy to correct their misconception.

Historians like to say Cyrus had “no thought of” moulding conquered countries in a Persian mould. That was perhaps true and realistic, but Ahuramazda was always depicted as a god rising above the solar or equinoctial disc, implying that the Persians saw him as transcendental, and certainly Cyrus was interested in persuading people that the true god was universal in outlook. His purpose seems to have been practical and political rather than religious, but it was a policy that led to all the main patriarchal religions of today. Cyrus was the founder of the modern great religions!

His novel and clever policy of conquest was to be generous to defeated people. In his propaganda he painted himself as the saviour and legitimate ruler of a conquered country. This must have been such a shock to people who expected to be massacred by conquerors that they could only conclude it was true.

Cyrus's religious policy was an extension of this practical policy—to make it seem to be God's will, whoever the local god was. He reshaped the Marduks and Yehouahs as Ahuramazdas—transcendental gods, suns beyond suns. To do so, he “restored” the local gods, but the restoration was in a mould that suited a universal king. The

“restored” god was willing to look beyond his traditional worshippers to a world scale to recognize a righteous king when it saw one and approve of him in the appropriate way.

He got people to believe his propaganda by transporting them to a country that he declared was their proper homeland, where they had to start anew from the facts the Persians provided. Cyrus was their saviour, so-and-so was their rightful god, the god recognized Cyrus as the saviour—“Go thee and do likewise” and we Persians will help you.

Cyrus “restored” Yehouah to Jerusalem and supposedly 40,000 worshippers of Yehouah—Jews, for that is the name of people who worship Yehouah wherever they come from—“returned” to Jerusalem. The truth seems to be that very few did. Into the third generation of captivity and having the privileges of a deported class, the Judeans are unlikely to have wanted to return.

In the Jewish scriptures, Cyrus is presented as a saviour and an agent of God—the Jewish god, Yehouah—and is even described as the messiah (the anointed). Yehouah had used the righteous but foreign king, Cyrus, to avenge the Jews against Babylon. We even find Yehouah shaking Cyrus by the hand (*Isa 45:1*) just as Bel had done:

Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him.

Two separate gods, Marduk and Yehouah, of people who were enemies, Babylonians and Jews, saying kind things about a foreign prince, choosing him as a deliverer and taking him by the hand in proof. It all begins to look suspicious—like pro-Cyrus propaganda. Cyrus depicted himself as the benefactor of conquered peoples and the “restorer” of gods to their rightful place.

The leaders of the “returners” were Zerubabel, supposedly a member of the Jewish royal family, and Joshua, supposedly the descendant of a dynasty of High Priests. The name Joshua means “saviour!” They were accompanied by an assortment of Persian officials.

Is it not curious that Zerubabel, a Jewish leader, should have a distinctly Babylonian sounding name, and one that in “Zeru” suggests “Zara” (Zoro), the beginning of Zoroaster’s name, the latter part simply meaning Babylon? Zara pertains to the sun and seems to have connotations of “power” or “strength” and so “protecting” or “saving”. Zerubabel is the “saviour from Babylon”. The same is true of a later and more famous Jewish leader to “return”, Ezra, where again we have the characteristic consonants “ZR” appearing in a language which did not write vowels, so that it could equally be rendered as Zara—another saviour!

In fact, Zerubabel was the *Tirshatha*, the Persian governor, whose duty was to act on behalf of the king, Cyrus, and whose bogus Jewish royalty was to give him authority over the skeptical natives of Judah. He is also called Sheshbazzar which seems to mean “mighty power of the king” or “citadel of the king”.

The society of Jerusalem was a feudal class system based on aristocracies called “houses” of princes and nobles, rulers and elders. The Persian governor was the top official but then came the priestly houses, led by the High Priest, a hereditary position. Sacred objects supposedly stolen by Nebuchadnezzar from the temple in



Jerusalem were returned by Cyrus, but Nebuchadnezzar would have melted down or broken up any valuables to make them easier to transport, and so these were new items given by Cyrus to furnish the new temple.

Historians, believing the bible rather than their inspection of the relevant documents, have said that Cyrus was kind to Jews because he found the Jewish God so impressive and akin to his own god, Ahuramazda. Most biblical scholars would not be interested in anything that cast any doubt upon the bible, and if it looked threatening, would denounce it as fraud or copying or anything else they could think off. Here the evidence is as clear as could be that Cyrus manipulated the worshippers of Yehouah that he had returned to Jerusalem, exactly as he had manipulated the worshippers of Marduk.

Before the exile, the Jews conceived of their anthropomorphic tribal God as a fertility and storm god. The earlier Yehouah had been a local god that the simple hill folk of Palestine could easily recognize. Most called him *Baal*/their word for *Lord*. The “Jews” who “returned” worshipped a different Yehouah from those who had been originally deported. This Yehouah was a universal god like Ahuramazda, the Persian Most High God, who thought nothing of choosing a foreign prince as a Jewish messiah. He was good, perfect, remote and a God of righteous living—just like Ahuramazda. He was, however, also a vengeful god for those who did not live righteously. Naturally, since no one previously had known that Yehouah was like this, all of His earlier worshippers were sinners! That is why He had had His revenge, but now He had sent the Persian kings as His saviours.

The Jewish scriptures have a remarkable clue that the Yehudim were not natives of the hill country but were from Babylon. It is the story of Abraham, supposedly the father of the Jewish race who in the legend travelled from Ur “of the Chaldees” to Judaea. Abraham was allegedly travelling about 2000 BC but the Chaldees did not exist then, it was the name of the neo-Babylonian empire at the time of the “exile” so Abraham is simply a symbolic “returner” shoved into the past anachronistically.

Cyrus was killed on the eastern front in 530 BC and his body was laid embalmed in a tomb with a pitched roof typical of ancient Indo-European tombs. He was still there 200 years later and was seen by Alexander the Great. Evidently Cyrus was not exposed in a silent tower as the Zoroastrian religion requires, showing the Achaemenids were not strictly Zoroastrian or that this was a requirement introduced later.

### **Darius the Great (522-486 BC)**

The son of Cyrus, Cambyses, a more ruthless man than his father completed the conquest of Egypt, ending traditional pharaonic rule for good. Following standard policy, Cambyses transported the ruling class of the Egyptians, including Pharaoh and his family, to Susa, but legitimized his rule by paying homage to the Egyptian gods. Then, so as to appear to the common people as a deliverer, he ordered the administration to introduce reforms to benefit them. While conquering Egypt he incidentally made several north African Greek colonies, like Libya and Cyrenaica to submit, thus bringing more of the Greek world into the Persian ambit.

In Egypt, Cambyses set up or sponsored a garrison of Jewish soldiers at Elephantine. According to a later letter,



a temple to Yehouah had been set up here before the Persians came, and the polytheistic nature of the gods worshipped there besides Yehouah serves to confirm the idea. The name of Yehouah or Yeho as a god appears all over the Levant, not just in the Judaeian hills, and even as far south as the Sinai, which is where Yehouah first appeared to Moses in the biblical myth.

So the Semitic people of the Levant had Yehouah among their other gods and expatriate Semites in Egypt had apparently set up a temple for their devotional purposes. The presence of the temple will have suggested Elephantine as a suitable spot for Cambyses' military colony of Jewish soldiers.

The alternative view is that Cambyses had attempted to help the "returners" to Jerusalem by conscripting a lot of the Am ha-Eretz opponents of the new Yehouah temple and deporting them to Egypt where he allowed them to set up a temple to the traditional Yehouah and his heavenly court.

Cambyses was said to have disparaged the Egyptian gods and killed the Apis Bull, but inscriptions cast doubt on this. It seems to have been Egyptian and Greek propaganda, made possible because Cambyses was soon dead, either of suicide in the face of mass uprisings or, more likely from gangrene in an accidental wound caused by his own knife (Persian nobles all wore a knife) loosing its sheath and impaling him in the groin as he jumped on to his horse. A cousin of Cambyses, Darius, one of the seven Persian princes, seized power and, though faced with considerable opposition eventually put down the rebellions and re-united the vast Empire.

To mark his success, Darius built the large monument at Behistun between Egbatana and Kirimanshah. Ahuramazda, typically rising head and shoulders above a winged circlet, overlooks Darius treading over a usurper while eight other false kings trail behind in bonds. The inscription tells the story of the revolts but says "Ahuramazda and the other gods helped me" confirming again that the Achaemenids did not consider Ahuramazda the only god, but the highest of them. Even Persis had been in revolt and Darius moved his capital to Persepolis. The dangers of the liberality of Cyrus had been proved and Darius determined to set up a much more formal and effective system of governance.

A Greek admiral was ordered to build a fleet in the head waters of the Indus and find a way to Egypt. He succeeded in 30 months. Darius wanted to secure the north and planned to invade Scythia via the Hellespont. In preparation he forced Byzantium to submit, conquered Thrace and Macedonia and moved a massive army across the Hellespont and the Danube on bridges of boats built by Ionian Greek engineers. He was ready to force the European Greeks to submit and the Athenians were happy to do so, but the Spartans objected.

Attempting to be assured of Athenian loyalty with a large bribe, the Persians came up against the paradox of democracy. The Athenians were now offended and sided with the Spartans. Meanwhile the Greeks of Ionia decided it was a good time to revolt and set up the Ionian league, supported by Athens, seizing Sardis, the Persian regional capital, except for its citadel. The Persians re-asserted themselves in 497 AD and treasure was taken and populations deported. Milesian Greeks were settled at the mouth of the Tigris where earlier the settlement of Aramaeans had helped to destabilize the country of Elam, allowing the Persians to take root. At Lesbos, young women were taken for the harems and young men were castrated, leaving the remaining women to satisfy themselves in unconventional ways.

Darius sent a fleet under a Median admiral to secure Athens. He captured the town of Eretria on Euboea and

transported the citizens to Susa as slaves. They were settled at Arderikka and still spoke Greek in the first century AD, according to the supporters of Appollonius of Tyana. Their abduction was bad psychology for creative and perverse people like the Greeks and it only had the effect of again uniting them and allowing them to win the battle of Marathon (490 BC). Turning to a rebellion in Egypt, Darius died in 486 BC.

Marathon and Salamis are written off as ignominious failures for the Persians, who are depicted in history as fools and poltroons, but the inventive and creative Greeks lived on the mainland in Ionia, and were for long vassals of the Persians. All Greek achievements before the Persian wars were Ionian, and the Ionians taught the western Greeks seamanship and citizenship. The constitution of Athens took its main clauses from those of the Ionian cities. The talent, art, main population, wealth and commerce of the Greeks were in the eastern cities, while the Balkan cities were impoverished.

That, above all, is why the Persians were not unduly interested in European Greece, and the invasions of Darius and Xerxes were less aimed at conquest than to punish the western Greeks for helping the eastern Greeks in rebellion. If they hoped to subdue the western Greeks, the Persian kings failed, but those Greek cities who did not surrender as far south as Athens were razed, and Thrace was set up as a Persian buffer in Europe. When the independent Greeks defeated the Persians at Plataea, the spoils of victory were dedicated to Apollo at Delphi as “the spoils of the Persians, the Macedonians and the Thebans” so both Macedonians and Thebans were subject to the Persians and fought with them. The Persian empire therefore began in Europe, about forty miles from Athens. Macedonia was Persian for the first half of the Persian empire’s existence, and Thrace for even longer. Ionia remained a Persian colony, or in its sphere of influence.

The Persians lost some critical battles that the Greeks worked up in their propaganda, but the Persian kings considered that they had achieved most of their goals, and were able to keep the undefeated Greeks fighting each other for a hundred years until they exhausted themselves. Alexander was subject to Persian as well as Greek influences, a factor that might have been crucial to his success against the Persians.

From the time of Darius, the kings were laid in rock tombs. In his tomb inscriptions at Naqsh-e Rostam, Darius praises Ahuramazda as creator of earth, sky, man and man’s happiness, and as the god who made Darius the king. The inscription lists people who were obedient to the king, through the favour of Ahuramazda, and it lists provinces where disturbances were quelled, through the grace of Ahuramazda. On it, Darius says his law did not allow the strong to strike the weak. He then lists the buildings he has erected and concludes with a prayer for Ahuramazda and “the gods” to protect him, his dynasty and his inscriptions.

Darius’s inscriptions generally pray for Ahuramazda to protect the Royal House and the country from foreign armies, famine and the Lie. The “Lie” in Zoroastrianism is the equivalent of “sin” in Judaism—it is disobeying the word of God. The consequence of this in practical terms for Persian kings was that avoiding the baneful influence of the “Lie” meant, among other things, that the people would have to accept the Shahanshah as God’s regent on earth. Herodotus notes that Persians never prayed for personal benefit but only for benefits for Persia—they prayed for the good of the king, the people and the country.

## **The Legacy of Darius**

Darius realized Cyrus had been too generous—in diplomacy generosity is often taken advantage of. The policy

of the Great King as protector was continued but the individual kings were now effectively governed by the Satraps—"Protectors of the Kingdom"—a Persian noble. He divided the empire into twenty Satrapies to which he appointed his own loyal generals and Persian administrators, richly endowed with land and exempt from taxation. But there was no question of trying to force obedience by force of arms. The old diplomacy of Cyrus still had to be at the core but now Persians were to be the senior administrators.

The Satrap stood alongside a local army commander and a local collector of taxes, all equal but independent and reporting only to Darius. Thus local power was divided. As extra safeguards, the Satrap had an official secretary whose task was to record everything that the Satrap did and report it to the emperor. Finally, Darius also appointed inspectors—"Ears of the King"—whose job was to call unexpectedly on any area official to check what he was doing. He had an independent small force of armed men to protect himself and enforce his actions if needs be.

*Truth* and *Justice* were paramount for Darius, though he was just as likely to use propaganda in his public statements as other eastern potentates. Famous stelae of law like that found in Babylon, together with the moral code of his own religion, inspired Darius to set down just laws. Rule by consent was still aimed for, and, Persian judges held office for life as long as they were not corrupt. Under the guise of religious "restoration" Darius hoped to pass off his laws on to local communities.

In Egypt, Darius had the rules and immunities granted by the pharaohs to the temples "codified" and made available in Demotic and Aramaic script so that the privileges of the priests would be secured. Doubtless many a clause was inserted favourable to himself that no priest could object to because no one knew the full corpus of religious law anyway! He also restored the Houses of Life, the schools and hospitals, attached to the temples. He was doing the same in Egypt as he did elsewhere. At Magnesia on the Meander river in Ionia, a Satrap was rebuked for trying to curtail the privileges of the priests of Apollo. Persian kings, as in Jerusalem, were keen to have the priesthood on their side.

Besides these legal and administrative reforms, Darius built a fine road network, only patches of which now remain. The Royal Road from Susa to Sardis in Asia Minor was 1600 miles long and could be traversed by caravan in 90 days, but post stations every 15 miles kept fresh relays of horses for the king's couriers who could cover the distance in seven days. Such good roads and sound administration encouraged commerce.

The royal road was said to pass for its whole length "through country that is inhabited and safe". This great highway made much of central Asia Minor accessible to Iranian colonists, who were attracted by its fertile river-valleys and wide plains. Noble fiefholders naturally had an interest in developing their estates, and this interest was quickened in them as Zoroastrians, for whom good cultivation of the land is a religious duty.

A Persian landowner in Lydia dwelling in a fortified manor house on his own estate, had armed retainers in his service, as well as slaves to work the land. His house was attacked by Greek raiders and a beacon was lit which brought a Persian neighbour to his aid, with his own body of fighting men, and some official forces also, and the marauders were driven off. The incident suggests a number of Persian estates in this, and doubtless other, fertile regions of western Asia Minor, with mutual support among the landowners and in general effective Persian vigilance and control.

Persian nobles must have brought skilled farmworkers with them from Iran, for still, in the fourth century AD, many villages scattered about Cappadocia were entirely inhabited by Iranians, descendants of the original colonists. Achaemenid armies were generally accompanied by women, and the long survival of some of these settlements must owe much to their being ethnically and culturally homogeneous, founded by Iranian families. Another practical policy adopted by the Persians and useful to commerce and diplomacy alike was to use the popular and widespread language, Aramaean, rather than Persian as a *lingua franca*. Few people in the world at the dawn of the Achaemenid age knew Persian and, since it was not a written language, a special script now called Old Persian script was invented from Assyrian cuneiform script. The kings used it on inscriptions but for pragmatic reasons they used Aramaean otherwise, and helped to spread it as far as India.

Mesopotamian languages after the Sumerians were all Semitic and Aramaean was Syrian Semitic which gradually spread naturally then got a boost when the policy of transportation was introduced. Many Aramaean speakers were transported into the areas of Old Sumeria and Elam, as well as elsewhere, and it became the language everyone picked up a bit of, until it became the language everyone spoke. Significantly, the traditional script of the Hebrew language is this Aramaean script introduced by the Persians, and it differs from the Old Hebrew script used by the Samaritans.

The Persian empire above all improved commerce. The Persians introduced standard taxation, introduced coinage, first used by king Croesus of Lydia. Persian coinage did not catch on everywhere, so Darius introduced accurate weights and measures to ensure fair trading. They are however mentioned in the Jewish scriptures (1 Chr 29:7) where king David's nobles offer Persian darics ("adarkons", translated "drams" in KJV) for the upkeep of the temple. This is almost 500 years before darics were invented, but shows when and by whom the myth of David was written. Darics were gold coins but a lesser silver coin was called by a Babylonian word, segals—shekels.

Darius employed people in public works in mines, roadmaking and canal digging, drained swamps, spread useful animals and plants including domestic fowl and doves, promoted other useful activities in foodstuffs like the drying and pickling of fish so that it could be transported inland. They took pistachios to Aleppo, sesame to Egypt and rice to Mesopotamia. Persian kings were interested in public welfare. Later, the Greek kings continued this policy.

The standard of living rose throughout and was higher in the centres of Persia than it was in the Greek cities we so much admire. Partly this was because the greater volume of trade and enterprise took goods downmarket that had previously been the exclusive interest of the rich. More people benefited and standards as a whole rose. Banking boomed also. Banking had traditionally been the prerogative of the temples in, for example Babylonia, but there were private bankers too. It was private banking that boomed, although the general swell of wellbeing spread so far as Greece and the temples of Delos, Delphi and Olympia all opened as banks based on Asian models. The role of the Temple of Jerusalem as a private bank in which the simple deposit their money as "corban" and the priesthood drew it out is well known!

Darius specified fair wages for workers and, since wages were often paid in kind, the values of standard goods were also specified so that the worker knew they were getting the right weight. Some serfs were tied to the estates but many were free and workers moved around in an extensive labour market. Tablets at Persepolis speak of workers from all over the empire. There must have been a labour exchange. There was certainly an

imperial direct labour force working on palaces, temples and other large projects for the king. After 520 BC, Persian names are increasingly found in the city rolls of Babylonia, a result of the displacement of Persian smallholders from the plateau by the larger more efficient estates.

Deportations continued and some were depicted as having been voluntary. Herodotus tells of Milesians transported from Ionia to the Persian gulf to establish sea-going routes to India and Egypt but little impression was made, perhaps simply because the wood to make ships was not readily available. The Peonians of Thrace were deported to Phrygia by Darius, but Herodotus says that many were shortly able to escape back home during an uprising encouraged by the Greeks.

Alexander used the same policy after the end of the Persian empire and, in the second century BC, it was still being used by the Parthians. Mithradates II transported Scythians into Seistan, now on the border of Iran and Afghanistan.

- ❑ [Professor Pierre Briant's](#) remarkable website on the Persian Period on which he aims is "to make accessible and downloadable all documents pertinent to Achaemenid history: texts and inscriptions in every language and script, seals and seal impressions, coins, reliefs, results of excavations and surveys, etc".

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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 2. How Persia Created Judaism

### Persians' Religious Policy

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#### Respecting Gods of Vassals

All of the imperial powers that the Iranians met had a powerful national god. In Urartu—Khaldi, in Assyria—Assur, in Babylon—Marduk, in Elam—Humban. As Mary Boyce puts it: “This was the time of ethnic faiths, when every people honoured their own gods”. Maybe it was a reason that the Achaemenids adopted Zoroastrianism. It meant that generally an imperial state like Assyria would respect the gods of vassal states—the gods the vassal called upon as its witnesses to the vassalage treaty. The suzerain would make votive offerings to the gods of a subject people as a sign of good-will, most notably if they had surrendered rather than resisted.

Such “respect” did not mean that the imperial power would not impose its own gods on to people of countries it annexed into the empire rather than ruled as a colony, nor did it mean that the imperial power would not use diplomatic, cultural and propaganda campaigns to influence the attitudes of conquered or subject peoples in the colonies. They fully realized how much better it was to promote a sympathetic party in a nation than to batter it head-on with armies. Such methods were necessarily subtle because they would obviously not work if people realized they were being manipulated. These great conquering powers were not unsubtle—subtle enough to fool Jews and Christian scholars for millennia!

Western historians, especially Biblicists, persuade themselves that ruthless soldiers like the leaders of these imperial nations became pussy-cats when it came to religion. Out of pure kindness, they rebuilt temples, restored gods that had been suppressed, and returned plundered divine images stolen centuries before to the renovated temples. All in the hope the people would be grateful. It just does not hack. They knew human nature was more perverse than that. They did it, but the god restored and the ritual presented as proper were what suited the conquerors! And it is most unlikely that the restored priesthood were independent. They were agents of the conqueror.

Proof that the Persians were not tolerant in general is their treatment of their near neighbours, the friendly Elamites, non-Iranians who eventually were attacked for not worshipping Ahuramazda, and were punished severely for “hostility”. The Persians doubtless reached a point where they questioned the Elamites adherence to daeva gods, the people having been closely linked for a long time, but whatever the cause it shows that Persians were interested in other people taking up the worship of Ahuramazda.

A further example that Persians had no excessive respect for other people’s religions is given by Xerxes, who took over the kingdom when his father died in 486 BC. He had been satrap of Babylonia for ten years but, on accession, had to put down rebellions in Egypt, then one in his former satrapy of Babylonia. He put them down with ruthlessness and no religious niceties. In Babylonia he destroyed the temple at Esagila that Cyrus had endowed, and even destroyed the statue of Marduk! It had been the centre of the official religion and therefore of religious and state ceremonial, so it was a punishing blow.



Some scholars see in the action a new policy of intolerance, but the intolerance was of ingratitude or ineptitude by priests who had been granted favoured positions to make sure such rebellions never happened. Tolerance was always shown towards those who co-operated but not towards those who caused trouble. There was no change in policy because Xerxes otherwise continued to favour temples and priesthoods that remained loyal and did their job of keeping people obedient. Herodotus confirms this, saying that when Xerxes marched through Greece, he allowed the destruction of the temples of those who were hostile but respected those of people who submitted.

Destruction of temples is recorded only as a punitive measure after political provocation.

M Boyce

## **Darius Re-Writes History**

The propagandizing inclination of the Persian rulers is well illustrated by Darius, who claims he defeated an impersonator of Cambyses' brother to take the throne. The tale does not hold water. It is propaganda to cover his own murder of his cousin. The whole tale is written for everyone to read on the great monument he erected at Behistun. It was also circulated widely in the regions.

Cambyses' popular brother seems to have instituted a coup in his brother's absence in Egypt, but Darius thought he was the better man, if coups were the order of the day, and so it proved. To cover his crime, Darius said Cambyses had murdered his brother before he left for Egypt, and that the uprising was led by an imposter, a magian called Bardiya (Greek, Smerdis) who looked like the dead prince and so pretended to be him, yet the imposter would have had to have fooled close family and courtiers. It is impossible. The man was who he claimed to be, and was really killed by Darius.

Cambyses therefore was blackened as a fratricide while Darius became a hero for righting an awful wrong. Boyce draws the parallel of the propagandists of Henry VII blackening the character of Richard III so successfully (with the help of Shakespeare) that the calumny has only recently been exposed. At Behistun, Darius followed the convention used by the Assyrians of attributing his success to the main god, here Ahuramazda, whose symbol floats above the scene, because the god recognized the victor as true and just—the upholder of Asha, righteousness. The example is clearly one of rationalization of the outcome. Darius had schemed and murdered, but for the greater good, it was necessary and right. His success proved that Ahuramazda approved. In the Zoroastrian scheme, misdeeds could be atoned for by a greater weight of good deeds, so Darius would escape with his soul in the balmy place by living righteously for the rest of his life.

Darius had six princes helping him in his plot and he set up them all as special advisers with great privileges. This by accident, or more likely intent, matched the six Amesha Spentas of Ahuramazda, showing again that the Shahanshah was the reflexion of God on earth. The kings from Darius were depicted on royal tombs supported by these six nobles, three on each side, and slightly to the back but looking toward the king.

## **King and God**

The winged figure of Ahuramazda does not represent the god, but his grace or blessing, responsible for wealth and success. The figure in the winged ring often looks like a miniature of the king, often wearing the same kind

of crown as Darius on his monuments, though sometimes it has an Assyrian crown. In the Avesta, god's grace is called "khvarenah" (Median, farnah) and manifests itself as a falcon, just as Horus, also represented by a winged disc did in Egypt. The word for the sun, "hvar", can be seen in khvarenah so presumably it was the benign warmth of the sun (showing perhaps the origins of the Iranians in colder climates).

When the sun makes his light shine... the invisible yazatas stand ready... They gather up that kvarenah, they store up that kvarenah, they distribute that kvarenah over the Ahura-created earth to prosper the world as Asha. (Y 6:1)

The sun is providing divine grace that the yazatas distribute. The figure on the disc might be the king rather than the god, thus symbolising the earthly manifestation of the god, or that, at any rate, is what Darius wanted to remind his subjects of. The Assyrian king had the title, "the sun god of the whole of mankind", and Darius wanted to propagate the same idea. Of course, we have no idea now whether even the Persian people understood these symbols as the god, the king, the god's fravashi or kvarenah or soul, and indeed these concepts seem to mingle to a degree even in the Avesta. Legally, the divine Ahuramazda could not be pictured, so if the image was not the king it had to be a representation of the grace of the god, but that could be pictured as the king! Simple folk and children might have seen it as god, but the magi would have known it was a symbol of one of his attributes. It is shown offering or accepting the divine ring, the bond or promise of god.

Plutarch says the Persian king by custom was "the image of God and preserver of all things".

## **Prophecy as Propaganda**

Evidence that the Persians were great propagandists, and used prophecy for propaganda purposes, comes from an oracle delivered to Nabonidus of Babylon about 553 BC. Cyrus had ruled about five years, and the discovery of the oracle shows that in the eight years from his accession to the time when he defeated Astyages the Mede, he was carefully preparing the ground for it. The oracle prophesied that in three years time the gods of Babylon would cause Cyrus to rise against the Medes and take them into bondage. Conceivably this oracle could have been propaganda after the event pandering to the Babylonians via their gods, and doubtless the Persians did this too, but scholars are sure this oracle preceded the event, so its aim was to predispose the Babylonian king to favour Cyrus in his uprising against the Medes. Nabonidus would have been glad to see the power of the Medes weakened, and would have been inclined anyway to favour the rebels, but Cyrus was making sure. Boyce comments:

It suggests that there were skilful Persian propagandists at work among the priests of Babylon, who had convinced them of the success of Cyrus's planned uprising.

In other respects Cyrus prepared the ground too—by marrying into the Median royal family, Mandana, daughter of Astyages, by promoting Zoroastrianism, the religion of the Medes when Astyages might have favoured the older Iranian gods, and generally selling himself to Median nobles as a man worth supporting, because many Medes were glad to accept his leadership.

The question that this use of prophecy to influence events raises is whether the prophets of the Jewish scriptures served the same role. Boyce accepts that similar religious propaganda appears in the bible and she

cites *Isaiah* 40-48. Yehouah picked Cyrus (*Isa* 44:27-45:4,13) and the Chaldeans and Babylonians are punished (43:14;47:14). In reality, they were not because they surrendered with no trouble. It was also not true that Cyrus conquered Egypt and Nubia (*Isa* 45:14). That Cyrus was called the messiah (God's anointed) even though, as a gentile, he could not have been descended from David according to the myth, shows both that this was a newly coined word and that the legend of king David had not yet arisen so that the messiah was not yet associated with David. The passage was written by a Persian propagandist.

Though Cyrus is depicted as messiah, and historical errors occur, it does not necessarily mean that Cyrus had prepared the ground in advance, as he did with Nabonidus. He might have done, true, but the legend might with more likelihood have been built up later, when Babylon had been punished for its own rebellions and Egypt had long been conquered by Cambyses. The myth of the search for Cyrus's decree looks as though it was invented for propaganda purposes at exactly this time. It was found! The same ploy was used regarding *Deuteronomy*, but they pretended the discovery of it was before the Babylonian conquest!

Boyce goes on to say:

To this striking usage, *Second Isaiah* joins startlingly original theological utterances... markedly Zoroastrian in character.

Plainly they were not original in Iran but Boyce means they were in scriptural terms. This originality in Judaism is what makes *Isaiah* such a notable prophet for Jews and Christians.

Since *Genesis* and the *Psalms* are later than second *Isaiah*, the idea of Yehouah as the creator appears here in the bible for the first time too. It is a main theme of *Isaiah* 40-48 even though it is not directly relevant to the objective of assuring the Jews of deliverance by Cyrus as the agent of Yehouah. The implied power of the god as the creator would help assure the Jews that the prophecies would be upheld, but the extent to which the prophet dwells on the creation story shows it was not familiar to the audience. It was a new and unrecognized message to the "returners".

The fact that he claims it is old (*Isa* 40:12;28) is a familiar theme of this type of propaganda. The people were being "returned" to a land that they had never known, and were being told legends they had never heard but had to accept were those of their ancestors who had been unjustly deported. So, the stories had to be presented as the ancient legacy of the people. Morton Smith sees second *Isaiah* as drawing on a specific *Gatha* of the *Avesta*. *Yasna* 44 is the source.

In *Yasna* 44, Zoroaster asks Ahuramazda questions to which the god replies simply such as "I am" or "I do". *Isaiah* only differs in that the talking is done by Yehouah rather than the prophet.

Tell me truly Lord, who in the beginning, at the creation was the father of Justice? (GY 44.3.1-2)

Rain justice you heavens... this I, Yehouah, have created. (*Isa* 45:8)

Who established the course of the sun and the stars? Through whom does the moon wax and wane? (GY 44.3.3-5)

Lift up your eyes to the heavens. Consider who created it all, led out the host one by one. (*Isa* 40:26)

What craftsman made light and darkness? (GY 45:5.1-3)

I am Yehouah. There is no other. I make the light. I create darkness. (*Isa* 45:7)

The passages in *Isaiah* are not merely translations of the *Avesta* but their relationship is too close to be coincidence. Someone has paraphrased the content of the *Yasna* for a different audience and purpose. Ahuramazda is the Zoroastrian creator, this being his main title, and this title is being given to the local Ahuramazda—God of the Heavens, identified with the Greek Zeus, just as Yehouah was.

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah began to urge the building of a temple in Jerusalem in the “second year of Darius”. We get the biblical story of the Edict of Cyrus being sought and found in Egbatana (Hamadan). It sounds like typical Persian cunning—an application of their popular technique of finding ancient documents that upheld their foreign policy. Whether the edict was original or not, it suited Darius to find it and uphold it. *Ezra* 5.1-6.10 explains that the priests were to be rewarded for offering sacrifices and praying for the life of the king and his sons. As Boyce rightly observes, “the king’s generosity had an obvious political ingredient”. *Ezra* 6:14-15 says the task was completed in four years. As for generosity, the cost was initially from tribute raised, a loss-leader, so to speak because when the tradition of obligatory sacrifice and tithes had been accepted, the temple became self-supporting, and indeed the centre for collecting tribute.

## Religion as Propaganda

The cosmological teachings of Anaximander of Miletus show marked Zoroastrian influence, according to M L West (*Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*, Oxford 1974). Anaximander lived just before Cyrus conquered Ionia, but Persian magi seem to have been propagandising before—the priests to the shrine of Apollo at Magnesia on the Meander welcomed the Persians and Cyrus rewarded the inhabitants of the town with tax breaks and freedom from forced labour. Boyce speaks of the “widespread activities of of Cyrus’s agents” who were “gifted as well as bold men”.

Strabo records a tradition that the temple of Zela in Pontus was set up for thanksgiving during Cyrus’s war against Lydia. Originally it was an artificial mount surrounded by a wall, typical of the sort of high open space favoured by Zoroastrians for worship. From then on, for a thousand years, Zoroastrian temples existed in Asia Minor.

After securing the east in several years of campaigning, during which his agents prepared the ground in Babylonia, raising dissention among the priests of Marduk who had been slighted by Nabonidus, who favoured the god Sin, Cyrus moved against Babylon. The whole of Chaldaea surrendered with little resistance! Syria, Palestine to the Brook of Egypt, and Elam all fell simultaeously as vassals of Babylonia.

In 1879 AD, a cylinder was found in Akkadian script, the usual writing of Babylonia, with 45 lines of an edict of Cyrus. The initial lines berate Nabonidus, but are incomplete. They speak of a weakling, dishonour, enmity, stopping the daily offering, presumably to Marduk, and instead offered daily hostility, all the dwelling places had become ruins and the people of Sumer and Akkad were like corpses.

He brought all of his people to ruin through servitude without rest. Because of their complaints, the lords of the gods became furiously angry and left their land. The gods, who dwelt among them, left their homes, in anger over his bringing into Babylon.

It seems Marduk took pity on his people and searched everywhere in all lands...

...for a righteous prince, after his own heart, whom he took by the hand. He called Cyrus, king of Anshan, by name. He appointed him to lordship over the whole world... Marduk, the great lord, looked joyously on the caring for his people, on his pious works and his righteous heart. To his city, Babylon, he caused him to go. He made him take the road to Babylon, going as a friend and companion at his side. His numerous troops, in unknown numbers, like the waters of a river, marched armed at his side. Without battle and conflict, he permitted him to enter Babylon. He spared his city, Babylon, a calamity. Nabonidus, the king, who did not fear him, he delivered into his hand. All the people of Babylon, Sumer, and Akkad, princes and governors, fell down before him and kissed his feet. They rejoiced in his sovereignty. Their faces shone. The lord, who by his power brings the dead to life, who amid destruction and injury had protected them, they joyously blessed him, honouring his name.

I am Cyrus, king of the world, the great king, the powerful king, king of Babylon... Eternal seed of royalty whose rule Bel and Nabu love, in whose administration they rejoice in their heart. When I made my triumphal entrance into Babylon, I took up my lordly residence in the royal palace with joy and rejoicing. Marduk, the great lord, moved the noble heart of the residents of Babylon to me, while I gave daily attention to his worship. My numerous troops marched peacefully into Babylon. In all Sumer and Akkad I permitted no enemy to enter. The needs of Babylon and of all its cities I gladly attended to... and the shameful yoke was removed from them. Their dwellings, which had fallen, I restored. I cleared out their ruins.

Marduk, the great lord, rejoiced in my pious deeds, and graciously blessed me, Cyrus, the king who worships him, and Cambyses, my own son, and all my troops, while we, before him, joyously praised his exalted godhead. ...the gods, who resided in them, I brought back to their places, and caused them to dwell in a residence for all time. ... by the command of Marduk, the great lord, I caused them to take up their dwelling in residences that gladdened the heart. May all the gods, whom I brought into their cities, pray daily before Bel and Nabu for long life for me, and may they speak a gracious word for me and say to Marduk, my lord, I permitted all to dwell in peace.

Another cylinder said that Cyrus rebuilt Esagila and Ezida, respectively the temples of Marduk and Nebo at Babylon and Borsippa. A long poem apparently by a priest of Esagila praises Cyrus and curses Nabonidus. Interestingly, the Seleucid king, Antiochus I, did exactly the same as Cyrus, restoring these two temples and making sure everyone knew about it. Cyrus told these defeated people that he ruled them through the wishes of their gods. Since Cyrus plainly did not believe that these gods were legitimate, being a believer in Ahuramazda, it has to be admitted that he was simply using the foreign gods to manipulate their worshippers. The next question is: Was the restoration genuine, or did he "restore" what suited the empire. Did he restore them in their previous rites and beliefs or did he change them in the process? The Jewish scriptures should be proof enough that he changed them utterly.

Supposedly, Cyrus allowed deported people to return home as the scriptures say (*Ezra* 6:3-5). Several different peoples are mentioned on the cylinder seals and it is assumed that each of them would have had similar promises to those given above or in the Jewish scriptures. Frightened Biblicists attribute the whole of this Persian imperial policy to the magnanimity of the Achaemenids, with no conditions or ulterior motives. They

dare not accept that religion was used for the purpose of foreign policy, to control the subject people.

In the days before mass communication, it *was* mass communication! Few people would not go to their temple or place of worship on the prescribed occasions and hear the words of their god read out. The strategy of the Shahanshahs was to ensure that what they heard inculcated respect for the Great King, the god that had picked him out to rule the world, and the laws that they formulated and presented to the people. To be rewarded the people must be obedient, and to pay their tithes and taxes was a duty to god. People who did this were righteous. Just in case they were not, and proving the practical nature of the whole policy of retoration, is the fact that “restored” temples in frontier territories nearly always had an attached fortress!—in Jerusalem, what eventually became the Antonia Tower.

The belief in the universal dominion of a supreme god, the idea that a local deity, let us say, Koshar of Ugarit, reigns also over Crete and Memphis, changed the formula of homage but left intact its content. A new ruler received the lordship from each universal god simultaneously, and established his relations to each god separately as before.

E J Bickerman

The Persian kings paid dutiful homage to each local god as the universal god. They had control of the land in fact through conquest, but sought to confirm it in law—the law of God, whatever name he had locally. So, their policy was to restore what had previously been national gods that approved local rulers, as a universal god that approved the Persian rulers. Obviously, this was a long-term policy. It was winning the hearts and minds, and simple people had to be treated differently from clever ones. That was the purpose of deportation. Clever people were removed from their power base and given a power base elsewhere that they held contrary to the local people and only with the support of the empire. They were made princes and priests in a strange country to control the local people on behalf of the Great Kings. They were privileged but precarious. As Mary Boyce says:

It would have been impossible for the Persians to have imposed their own religion on the numerous and diverse peoples of the ancient lands they now ruled.

Cyrus and his descendants were not so crude. They did not impose their own religion, they generously “restored” the old one, using the proven method of deportation. But curiously enough, the old one had significant features of the Persian religion once restored. Boyce knows that Cyrus was an expert propagandist and there was no better propaganda than religious propaganda. The religious right in America know it still. Even liberal Presidents of the USA have to end every speech with the mantric words, “God Bless America”.

People of religious conviction are convinced that what is good for their god is good for everyone. Doubtless Persian kings felt the same way. Cyrus and Darius were not so foolish as to try to force people to worship an unknown god, but the Jewish scriptures testify to the fact that the restored god might not have been recognizable to the local population, despite a familiar name and certain traditional trappings. Pace Bickerman, they rather changed the content of the old religions towards Zoroastrianism while leaving symbols intact.

Boyce, kow-towing, it seems, to the sensibilities of Jews and Christians, claims that what influence there was was “not official proselytizing” but only individuals “speaking ardently” about their Zoroastrian faith. No doubt there were such people too, but obviously imperial policy could hardly have been openly known without being



self-defeating. It is perverse to say that Cyrus's propagandists were unofficial amateur missionaries, and, once it is accepted that they were conducting an official policy, there is no further reason to draw the line at their use of religion as propaganda.

## **The Same in Egypt?**

Why leave out Cambyses? No reason, despite the bad press he had from the Greeks and Egyptians. They claimed he was a madman who knifed the Apis bull and had destroyed Egyptian temples. It seems not to have been true. Though his soldiers had plundered them, he had quickly taken action to stop it and "restore" them. Like his father, Cambyses was keen to use religion. He restored the priesthood of Sais, presented libations for Osiris and venerated Neith, the goddess of the city. He also claimed he was a legitimate ruler of Egypt because his mother was the daughter of the Pharaoh that Psamtik III's father had deposed. Royal inheritance in Egypt remained in the female line until this point in history.

The well-known letter from the priests of Yeb dated about 410 BC claims the temple to Yehouah there had been established before Cambyses. It agrees that Cambyses had destroyed Egypt's temples but had spared Yehouah's. The priests over a hundred years later probably accepted the falsehoods of the Egyptian priests as history. After Darius had succeeded him, the Persians had no interest in countering such propaganda. Darius was the legitimate successor of Cyrus. It is easy to see why the priests of Yeb did not want to admit their foundation by Cambyses.

That Cambyses, a man with a dishonourable reputation, had set up their own temple was denied by their claiming the temple to Yehouah had preceded his campaign and victory. Cambyses had intended to conquer Ethiopia but had failed. He will have left Jewish troops there to guard the border because Egyptians were unreliable, having just been defeated and resentful, and that will be when the Yeb temple was set up (524 BC). Since this is before the Jewish temple at Jerusalem had been established, and long before Ezra, the Jews of Yeb worshipped something closer to the original Canaanite Yehouah and his family.

Darius sent his Egyptian collaborator, Udja-Hor-Resenet to Egypt to "restore" the "Houses of Life" attached to the temples where the holy books, inscriptions and precedents were kept, and theology and medicine were studied. The layman who had a problem would come here for priestly advice. There was an important house of life at Edfu, a great temple dedicated to Horus. Edfu, from the Ptolemaic period that followed the Persian period, is the best preserved temple in all of Egypt, as it was covered in sand until recent times.

On one of the walls of the temple is engraved a list of the sacred books kept there. Along with the books on rules of the temple, inventories of the temple holdings, and religious calendars, there were numerous books on magic:

The Book of Appeasing Sekhmet, The Book of Magical Protection of the King in His Palace, Spell for Warding Off the Evil Eye, The Book of Repelling Crocodiles, The Book of Knowledge of the Secrets of the Laboratory, The Book of Knowing the Secret Forms of the God.

At the top of the hierarchy of priests was the high-priest, the sem priest, or "First Prophet of the God". One of the titles of the priest Nebseni in the *Book of the Dead* is "president of the secrets of the temple". He was a

learned man, an elder of the temple, an accomplished administrator and politician. As in Judaism, only priests of the highest rank were permitted to enter each temple's holy of holies and care for the "oracle".

Bob Brier in *Ancient Egyptian Magic* tells us that a function of the priests was caring for the cult statues of the gods. Oracles were so called because they would nod their heads in answer to questions, and even talk. No one knows how this was done. Priests, called by the Greeks Stolistes, offered the god food several times a day, clothed him in the morning and sealed the chamber in the evening.

The priests would interpret dreams, supply incantations, prayers, magic spells, amulets, charms, or love potions, dispense cures for illnesses, and counteract malevolent influences. The books were for priests, and were kept from the few laymen who could read, using hieroglyphs as a secret code long after they had ceased to be generally used, having been replaced by hieratic and demotic—just as the Christian priests wrote only in Latin to keep their knowledge from the uneducated. Why should the Persian king have been interested in Egyptian medicine, law or theology? In restoring these schools and libraries he had *carte blanche* to change what was written down to whatever suited him. Doubtless during the restoration, the priests will have found invaluable lost books! Should there be any doubt he also commanded that Egyptian law should be recorded. Egyptologists seem not often to consider whether the papyri they find are pseudepigraphs written by the Persians to further their own policies.

Historians must ask themselves whether this was pure altruism, kindness and concern for an alien culture or whether here was a chance to strengthen Persian rule through the religious base. We find Egyptian inscriptions that, just as the scriptures say that Yehouah put Cyrus in charge of the world, Ra made Darius king of Egypt. To curry favour with the priests, Darius restored to them the revenues that Cambyses had imposed upon them. He built a large new temple to Amun-Ra, the Egyptian god closest in nature to Ahuramazda, at the oasis of el-Khargeh, and signs of a widespread influence in such matter are found elsewhere. He also supported the cult of the Apis Bull. Finally, a letter to his Egyptian satrap tells him to intervene in the appointment of high priests, proving what ought to be obvious, that great emperors like Darius could not avoid interfering in hugely influential positions like the priesthood. It is plainly imperative that the holders of the posts most influential upon the views of the people had to be the king's men.

## **Darayavahu**

Darius is properly Darayavahu. Yavahu is uncommonly like Yehouah (YHWH), and must have sounded similar. Vahu is the Iranian god of the wind, that became, like the Hebrew, to mean breath and so life, so Yavahu literally means the same as YHWH. Scholars admit the etymology of "DR" ("ZR") is puzzling. Literally, "zara" refers to the action of sowing seed in the fields (*Gen* 26:12; *Isa* 37:30), and seems to be a Semitic root. So, Zara in Hebrew is seed. Yet it is used in different senses either through metaphor or through the introduction of the same word with a new usage.

It means "progeny" as a metaphor of seed—so by a remarkable coincidence, Darayavahu can be read in Hebrew meaning "seed (progeny) of Yehouah", "seed of the living god". Indeed it is virtually the same as Israel (seed, progeny of El) except that the general word for god, El, has been replaced by the specific Yehouah.

Curiously, zara denotes Yehouah's establishing Israel in the land of Palestine in a future day in an interpretation

of Israel (Jezreel) as suggested above.

And they shall hear Jezreel. And I will sow (ZR) her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God. (*Hosea 2:22-23*)

Those returning under Darius could have been encouraged to read Israel as code for Darius, then it reads: “And they shall hear Darius...” And what is he doing? Adopting a people who are not his own people!

Oddly enough, sowing is scattering seed. These people that have been sown in the earth can just as easily be scattered. So it is also used in almost an opposite sense too, making it ideal as a poetic word that can be positive or negative according to the response of the people. Just the intention of the Persians. It is not surprising, then, that it is popular in “late” (post-exilic) works such as *Hosea*, *Isaiah*, *Psalms*, *Job* and *Proverbs*.

Having noted this it is perhaps hardly surprising that the same letters signify divine help, rescue or even salvation. In Ugaritic, DR (ZR) means “rescue” or “save”, appearing in personal names analogous to Joshua (Jesus), Hadididri (Hadad saves), Asarya (Yehouah saves), Isra (Salvation). Similarly ZR in the bible is used with the divine name (either El or Yah) to form Jewish proper names: Azarel, Azriel, Azariah and Ezra, but the “salvation” is downgraded to “help” in most translations. Merely to pray for “help” to a mighty god seems modest, unless it leads to salvation.

In the scriptures, the salvation is often from enemies in battle. Egypt will not “save” Judah and the prophet condemns reliance on it (*Isa 30:7*; *31:3*). *Chronicles*, books usually put in the same school as *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, is particularly emphatic of divine saving help. The *Psalms* too. Divine help to save the nation of Israel is a common theme in *Isaiah*(41:10, 13, 14; 44:2; 49:8; 59:7, 9)—through God’s aid, Israel will overcome her foes. *Psalms* makes it clear that the help is salvific, not merely assistance:

But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.

*Ps 37:39-40*

The parallels in these verses show that the help given is salvific. This was the intention of the Persian kings when they “restored” the gods and temples of their subjects. They wanted it to seem like a salvation and in their propaganda depicted it in no uncertain way as such. If the people, though, were ungrateful, the tables would turn.

It seems most unlikely that Darius would not have used the coincidence of the sound of his name in his propaganda to the worshippers of Yehouah, that the Persians were building up as loyal subjects in Palestine. Darius sent another batch of “returners”, possibly writing the prophetic pseudepigraph *Hosea* and parts of *Isaiah*, both of which mean “salvation”.

## **Nehemiah and Ezra**

Artaxerxes succeeded his father aged 18 when his father was murdered in a palace coup in 465 BC. In 458 BC, he abandoned Elamite as the language of the official records and introduced Aramaic. Doubtless the traditional Elamite scribes had been prepared for the change but more Persian scribes were being trained, initially in priestcraft, then specialising as scribes. These were all hereditary professions.

Under Artaxerxes, Megabyzes (Megabyxos, Bagabukhsha) was satrap of Abarnahara. he was a descendant of one of Darius's six nobles and was married to the sister of Artaxerxes. He shielded the Athenians whom he had fought and defeated in Egypt, until he was ordered by the queen mother Amestris, to kill them. Feeling dishonoured to have to break his word, he rebelled, twice defeating the king's forces until they came to a truce (c 450 BC).

In 444 BC, Artaxerxes sent Nehemiah to Jerusalem, instructed to bring the people into the fold of worship of Yehouah, a universal god of heaven. Morton Smith wrote:

He secured to the religion that double character—local as well as universal—which was to endure...

Boyce immediately notes that "Zoroastrianism itself had long had this double character".

Nehemiah was the "cupbearer" to Artaxerxes (*Neh* 2:1). Since Artaxerxes, as a devout Zoroastrian, could not have touched let alone drunk from a ritually unclean cup, Nehemiah must himself have been a Zoroastrian. Pollution in the Zoroastrian scheme was the result of the Evil Spirit who caused "dust, stench, blight, disease, decay and death". Devout people were obliged to stay clear of these noxious things to protect themselves as Ahuramazda's good creation. The king particularly required this protection, and we can be sure that his servants had a duty to keep him pure.

The Zoroastrian priests had instituted a rigorous cleanliness code to protect the devout. Indeed, cupbearer to the king would hardly have been a menial position and Nehemiah must have been a Zoroastrian priest, not a mere servant. Nor would a mere servant have been sent to a colony with such an important position and task. Nehemiah introduced these same purity codes to the Jews, and devout ones live by them still, though they do not understand the reason for them. The point here is that Nehemiah could not have been a Jew himself, if he was the royal cupbearer, unless the religion of the Jews was Mazdayasnism by another name.

Ezra was sent too in 458 BC or 398 BC, from the bible which says year seven of the king, but there were two kings called Artaxerxes. Some think the number is corrupt and should be 37, making the year 428 BC, allowing for an apparently close association with Nehemiah. Or was it year seven of Darius II (417 BC), the name of the king having been mistaken from an association with Nehemiah?

He was the "scribe of the law of the God of Heaven". For the Persians the god of heaven was Ahuramazda, but the title was interpreted to mean Yehouah. His duty was to write out god's law to a people who supposedly had an extensive law of their own god. *Ezra* 7:11-26 reads out a copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave him explaining the authority for his position. The letter emphasizes that people go only by their own free will, a statement that implies that it is not normally the case. One is led to ask why this case should be different.

And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that

whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily, Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them. And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

The king addresses his order to “all the treasurers which are beyond the river”. Now “beyond the river” is of course the Persian province Abarnahara, the whole of the Levant beyond the Euphrates. Jews and Christians pretend it means “beyond the Jordan”, but how many rich treasurers are there in Palestine alone? The rest of it shows the king is purporting to placate the people, making sure there is no wrath against the king—it has a political purpose. But who benefits financially—the priests and temple officials who are exempt from taxes. Furthermore, Ezra was to enforce the law on “all the people that are beyond the river”, and enforce it with savage measures.

Ezra was told to teach people the law if they did not know it and he is considered to have been the instituter of the “Priestly Code” (P) of the *Pentateuch*. Its indebtedness to Zoroastrianism is plain but never observed upon. The “Holiness Code” of *Leviticus* 18 to 26 is a code of purity from pollution that again is evidently dependent on Zoroastrianism, though apologists will pretend otherwise when they are obliged to comment at all. Such a denial is “as preposterous as it is pointless”, to use West’s phrase.

Ezra also added the creation in *Genesis* 1:1-2:4a, the sophisticated one. *Genesis* 1 is strikingly Zoroastrian in two ways:

1. The active principle of creation is the spirit of God, just as Ahuramazda creates through the Good or Holy Spirit.
2. The creation in both was in seven stages, surely an astonishing coincidence, though the descriptions of the creations are different.

A puzzle is the absence in the Jewish scriptures of teachings of fate after death, individual judgement, heaven and hell. Death brings Sheol. *Amos* 9 and *Psalms* 139 extend Yehouah’s rule to Sheol but only in *Isaiah* 26:19 is there hope of a future after death, and that, as in Zoroastrianism, is resurrection not immortality as a spirit. Mary Boyce writes:

Since Zoroastrian apocalyptic finds its counterpart in Jewish and Christian eschatology, not disjointedly but as part of the same fixed scheme which is to be discerned in the *Gathas*, it is difficult not to concede to Zoroastrianism both priority and influence.

Quite so but Boyce inconsistently thinks the Jewish purity laws are “wholly Jewish”. The destruction of death

(*Isa* 25:7-8) is a reflexion of the end of “limited time” in Zoroastrianism, when the evil creation is destroyed and the Evil Spirit is imprisoned forever. Judaism has Satan as an Evil Spirit, although he seems not to have an existence independent of Yehouah, and Yehouah claims to create both good and evil (*Isa* 45:7). Presumably Satan has his own inclination to create evil, independently of Yehouah, otherwise it is hard to see how he is such a trouble. That makes Judaism exactly equivalent to Zoroastrianism. What appear to be differences might be simply because we have two sources, neither of which is complete and both of which have had independent histories of compilation and redaction, so that they have evolved differences, but their identity at the centre is still obvious. Our knowledge of Jewish apocalyptic with the discovery and translation of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* shows that Judaism was much more dualistic than the scriptures suggest.

The Reverend Lawrence Heyworth Mills wrote to the Oxford Chronicle in June 1913:

No one denies the solemn and critical facts of the identities in themselves considered: the Theology, Angelology, Demonology, Soteriology, Virgin Birth, Immortality, Resurrection, Judgement, Chiliasm (Millennialism), Paradise, Heaven and Hell are rather more than less emphatically or repeatedly expressed in the Avesta than they are in Exilic pre-Christian Pharisaism.

Professor Mills says that even if there had been no historical contact between Judaism and Persian religion, the closeness of these themes would demand their careful study by Christians and Jews believing their own religions to have been revealed, because He must have revealed them somewhere else too! He concludes: If the Divine Power saw fit to make use of the Persian religious system to educate his people... this should only awaken reverential thanksgiving.

Rev L H Mills *Oxford Chronicle* 1913

In fact the Jews were subjects of the Persian kings for 200 years, and the Jewish scriptures declare that a Persian priest called Ezra had to give the Jews a law!

## Darius II Favours Jerusalem

Achaemenian kings took foreign wives but it was not common, the main wife was not usually foreign and others would have had to have converted or at least observed the Zoroastrian purity laws. The son of a Zoroastrian was regarded as fully Zoroastrian because it was the male seed that counted, the belief being that women were merely fertile land for the man's seed. Jewish belief was the same, which is why only a man could “beget” and why childless women in the scriptures are described as barren, like a barren field. The Achaemenid kings were pious but practical men. Their foreign marriages were likely to have been diplomatic, and not for the generality to copy.

Darius II was half Babylonian, but would not have been the heir of Artaxerxes I unless his son Xerxes II had not been immediately killed. Darius killed the assassin and took the throne. He continued the Achaemenid interest in restoring religions, but he was particularly interested in preserving temple archives, doubtless a job of some practical value. As in the case of the first Darius helping out in the “Houses of Life” in Egypt, he could alter the transcriptions to suit Persian policy, and could doubtless find the odd missing tablets. He “restored” the temple



of Eanna in Uruk and installed extensive archives.

The records of the bank of Murashi cover half a century up to about 400 BC. It shows how cosmopolitan Babylonia was. It was policed by foreign garrisons stationed permanently in the country, so the Persian kings were taking no chances even in what was the centre of their empire.

Darius favoured the Jerusalem priesthood. A revealing scrap of papyrus written from Darius to Arsames, his long-serving Egyptian satrap in 419 BC, and found at Elephantine, ordered that the Jews of Elephantine must keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days. It is a surprising order for those brought up believing myth is history. Why was it necessary? These traditions were supposed to have been almost a millennium old even then. Apologists say the feast had been forbidden so it was not an order to Jews but to the satrap himself. Why then was it phrased as an order to the *Jews* that they *must* obey? The Jewish messenger was a man called Hananiah, a Babylonian name (Eanna) and the name, by another of those coincidences that litter biblical history, of the brother of Nehemiah. The Jews of Yeb were of the older polytheistic faith of the Canaanites, and it looks very much as though the priests of Jerusalem had the king's support in bringing them into line with the practice in Jerusalem imposed by Nehemiah and Ezra.

A sandstone stele from Aswan dated itself precisely to June 458 BC. It records that the commander of the garrison at Syene had built a place of worship. Rather than an enclosed temple it might have been an enclosed space open to the massy heavens. In 408 BC, the Jewish military governor at Elephantine, probably a grandson of the man who built or restored a temple there, the command of the Syene garrison seems to have been inherited, colluded with the priests of Khnum to cut off the water supply from the Jewish garrison, then they destroyed the temple to Yahu. The satrap was absent at the time. Subsequently, the priests wrote to the Jerusalem priesthood and to the governor of Judah, Bagoas, for help in rebuilding the temple. It seems it never was given.

The whole events look suspicious. Arsames absents himself and a Persian military governor immediately helps to destroy a Jewish temple with the aid of Egyptian priests, even though Jews are loyal allies of the Persians, and this has been a Persian outpost manned by Jewish soldiers for a century. The truth must be that this older temple at Syene, being polytheistic, was an embarrassment to Persians and Jews and had to be ended. It is always presented as caused by the jealousy of the Egyptian priests, or their annoyance that the Jews would have been sacrificing sheep when the ram was the sacred animal of Khnum. Yet it was done with the help of the local Persian governor, and under a fancied policy of religious toleration in general and admiration for the Jews. It proves that there was no religious toleration in general. Religion was a policy option, and the kings had opted to support one temple to Yehouah—at Jerusalem.

### **Conscious Foreign Policy**

All of it shows that the Persian kings were not naïvely interested in restoring alien cultures out of some exaggerated sense of altruism to defeated people. It was a conscious foreign policy to get political control of subject people who had every reason to be resentful. It was to preserve the Persian peace, the Iranian sense of universal order.

Garbini notes that the *Demotic Chronicle* of Egypt, a papyrus dated in the third century BC but speaking of the

sixth and fifth centuries BC, takes the same attitude of the judgement of God on Egypt as the Deuteronomic History does on the Jews. It seems unlikely that a Jewish history should have inspired an Egyptian one, but not that Persian propaganda should have been used in Egypt as well as elsewhere. If this papyrus is accurately dated to the third century then it could be an edition of an earlier Persian work. The Persians will have done in Egypt what they did in Yehud, a finding with possibly profound consequences for Egyptology.

In his Egyptian inscriptions, Darius emphasizes “maat”, the Egyptian concept closest to “Asha”. Cyrus was the Messiah, the son of God, to the Jews, and Egyptian inscriptions declared that for Atum, Darius was “his son, his steward”, and that, “his person should be remembered beside his father, Atum”. Atum-Ra became the perfect equivalent of Ahuramazda, a hidden god behind the sun, who created the cosmos to be governed by “maat”. The sun rising each morning drove away the powers of darkness, symbolic of order driving away chaos. Rebellion is chaos, a product of the Evil Spirit, while order is good, an attribute of God.

A lesser parallel with what the Persians did in Jerusalem might have come to light in Asia Minor. A monument was found in 1973 declaring that the citizens of Orna had agreed to set up a cult of the god of Caunos, a nearby town. The god was to be called “the Lord the God of Caunos”, and seemed to be a local Apollo. They had sponsored a “house” for the god and specified sacrifices and endowments. Persians did not build “houses” for their gods because they felt they had the cosmos as their home, but they were happy to build temples for foreigners because they would then assemble there and provide the opportunity to hear the law. The monument specifies divine punishments for violating “this law” included being carried off to the “Abyss”.

Plainly this was not a Zoroastrian god, but had been granted certain Zoroastrian features, including an Iranian title of unknown meaning but used of Mithras. Mithras was guardian of the first watch of the day, sunrise, and Persian places of worship came to be called “Gates of Mithras”, an expression used by the Urartians. Zoroastrian worship always had to be done before noon, and this habit perhaps predisposed non-Iranians particularly to see Mithras as the visible face of Ahuramazda. It seems to be an early example of Apollo-Mithras syncretism, which was popular in the region a hundred years later and for many centuries thereafter.

It is curious too that the god is called the god “of Caunos” in some places and the god “of Orna” in others. Apparently a unifying formula, it is reminiscent of Yehouah being the god of Israel and of Judah. The scroll scholar, A Dupont-Sommer, said it showed the Persians had an office of state for overseeing and regularizing the religious affairs of subject people:

Not to impose on them Iranian divinities and cults but to ensure good order and security in a domain which in ancient societies was politically so important and often vexed.

Dupont-Sommer is sidelined nowadays mainly because Christians do not like his ideas about the Essenes and Christianity in interpreting the scrolls, but this insight shows him to be a perceptive man. The Persians had to approve the High Priest of any cult, and we can be sure he was not appointed purely for his piety. These were political appointments, and the practice of religion was a political act. The Reverend Professor Lawrence Mills detected a ministry or religious affairs, and Professor Boyce sees a chancellery department to deal with Zoroastrian foundations from at least the fourth century BC. It is difficult to see them as separate institutions.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 2. How Persia Created Judaism**  
**The Universal God**

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## **The Universal God**

The traditional view is that Cyrus and successive Persian kings of the sixth and fifth centuries BC were being religiously liberal in allowing the Jews to reconstruct their temple and its religion after they had been kindly returned from their exile in Babylon. But the religion of Yehouah, whose worshippers were called Jews, was remodelled thoroughly by the Persian world conquerors.

Their real aim was to spread the religion of Mazdayasnaism, or Ahuramazda worship, to consolidate their empire. Historians of the Persians often seem over eager to insist that the Persian kings had no wish to impose the religion of Ahuramazda on to subject people. The reason can only be to avoid any suggestion that Judaism might have been revealed by the Persian kings and not by Yehouah in person. They argue Persian kings would “restore” gods but not impose them. Why then did they destroy some gods?—though admittedly they called them daevas or devils, not gods. Note here the proper distinction held by Zoroastrians between devils and gods. As Creator of good things, Ahuramazda was the creator of good gods—the gods considered good of foreign nations. Bad gods were, of course, created by the Evil Spirit. This is why the Persians cannot be assumed to have had a favourable or even neutral stance to foreign gods. In fact, the judgement was purely practical. When people opposed the forward march of the Persians their gods were of the Evil Creation. If they welcomed them, they were of the Good Creation.

The Persian kings would destroy when their opponents had offered strong resistance. Alexander had the same policy. The destruction of a people who resisted included destruction of their gods. But sanctuaries were destroyed in Babylon in 482 BC, long after Cyrus had conquered it bloodlessly. Xerxes declares on an inscription that he had destroyed a sanctuary of false gods and worshipped Ahuramazda instead. It shows that Persian kings had no sacred regard for the religions of subject people when they had reason to categorize their gods as devils.

It seems that the Persians had decided that god of the Jews was of the Good Creation and so could be treated with favoritism. The Jews therefore were permitted to make the universal religion in their own image, guided by Persian officials because it had to be a religion made up of the essential truths handed down to Zoroaster by Ahuramazda, albeit presented in a way adapted to the local god.

In the history of later Persia, the Jews were honoured under the Arsacids, the Jewish Exilarch being fourth in rank after the king. Under the Sassanids, however, they came to be treated as Zoroastrian heretics. Both responses suggest an acceptance by Persians of a close relationship between Judaism and Zoroastrianism. Jewish and Christian apologists are desperate to assert there is no direct evidence the Jewish religion is dependent on the Persian religion. They mean they have no statement that clearly declares it as such and, if they found one, they would ignore it as a forgery or an error. Scholars such as Gaster and Söderblum deny any Persian influence but they do not venture any alternative, or seek to explain why these ideas arrived in Judaism

only after colonists “returned” from Persia.

The plain fact is that when Persian kings “restored” gods, the restoration was not to what they were—for which purpose most did not need any restoration. They were foisting their own god and Zoroastrian values on to defeated people but in the name of the local god, and to soften the pain, they offered them money and resources for new temples.

Persians offered the priesthoods in Babylon, Egypt, Elam, Sardis, Ionia and Judah support for the restoration of their religions. Cambyses (525-522 BC) had made attempts to reduce the financial incomes of the influential Egyptian temples, but Darius I (521-486 BC) commissioned the construction of temples including the temple in the el-Kharga oasis. The Egyptian official, Udjahorresne, who supported the Persians by supplying them with high born administrators, says the temple of Neith at Sais, of which he was a priest and should know, was restored.

After the Persian defeat at Marathon in 490 BC, the Egyptians rebelled in 486 BC, the beginning of a period of Egyptian unrest. Xerxes put the initial revolt down with great severity when he came to the throne (485 BC). He made his son, Achaemenes, Satrap, but he fomented more uprest with his cruelty. When Xerxes was assassinated (465 BC), the Egyptians revolted again, led by the son of Psammetichus III, prince Inaros, who became a legendary figure. The rebels were defeated and Inaros executed in 454 BC. Nehemiah was sent to restore the temple of Jerusalem about this time.

Few documents exist from this period, but the rest of the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-424 BC) was tranquil. Another uprising greeted Darius II (423-405 BC), and trouble brewed throughout his reign even though he tried through building projects to win over the Egyptians. It was this Darius, not Darius the Great, who is most likely the rebuilder or builder of the Jerusalem temple (417? BC).

Amyrtaos of Sais freed the delta in 404 BC. He was succeeded in 399 BC by Nephertites I of Mendes (399-393 BC) together with Psammuthis (393 BC) and Achoris (Hakor, 393-380 BC) who fortified Egypt against the Persian campaigns 385-383 BC. The Persians were defeated by Nectanebo I (380-362 BC) in 373 BC. Teos (Djedhor, 362-360 BC) followed briefly, then Nectanebo II (360-343 BC) staved off Artaxerxes III Ochus in 350 BC, but the Persian won in 343 BC setting up the Second Persian period that lasted until Alexander III of Macedonia, the Great.

The Persians were happy to accept various goddesses as the equal of Anahita. Cyrus the Younger worshipped in a temple of Artemis whom he must have considered to be Anahita. Anahita became popular in Cappadocia and Armenia and the Romans destroyed temples to Anahita in Armenia centuries later. They were happy to accept Apollo as the equivalent of Mithras. Apparently, “the god Mithras” in Aramaic script is a pun on “all the gods” offering a possible explanation of why Mithras came to be so important and the equal of Ahuramazda in many places. The temple to the god Mithras was the temple to all the gods. Mithras was widely worshipped in Persia notably in Anatolia, being attested in Lydia, Phrygia, Cilicia and Taurus, Pontus and Commagene, but sites as far away as Bactria and even outside of Persia across the Black Sea in Crimea have been found.

Iranians were happy too to accept Marduk or Zeus as the local name for Ahuramazda, especially as Zeus Theos and Zeus Magistos. Persians would not have wanted to create dissension by having two local gods seen as the

equal of Ahuramazda. If there were two candidates then one had to go. That is probably why El disappeared whereas Yehouah survived in Palestine. Ahuramazda was worshipped extensively in Lydia after the Persian conquest under the name Zeus. Alexander's successors and the Romans would doubtless have re-Hellenized these temples of Zeus worship, but conceivably those who did not like the Hellenized version adopted Judaism. Asia Minor had a large population of Jews in Roman times.

In western Asia Minor records of "Persian" temples cease from the third century AD when they were suppressed by Christian edict, but still in the 6th century Khosrou I Anushirvan negotiated with a Byzantine emperor to have fire temples rebuilt in his domains, most probably in Cappadocia. The existence has been traced of Persian Sibyllists oracles, probably the first non-Greeks to adopt the genre of Sibylline oracles, through which they conveyed Persian prophecies and expectations. In time such oracles grew generally into longer poems, through which doctrine could be conveyed. It thus appears to have been through Persians of the western diaspora that Zoroastrianism made a powerful contribution to religion and thought in the Hellenistic world.

### **The Influence of "Exile"**

Herodotus evidently had no knowledge of Yehouah and His remarkable chosen people, the Jews, or their ancient temple in Jerusalem when he wrote his histories about 480 BC, though even then the temple was supposedly nearly 500 years old! He *did* know of circumcision in the region, but this was a custom of the Egyptians and will only reflect Egyptian influence on Palestine through colonization. His history ended before Nehemiah, the Persian Eunuch, arrived as governor of Judah in 445 BC or Ezra, the priest, arrived in 428 BC, 397 BC or 417 BC (the date, year 7 of Artaxerxes might be of Artaxerxes II, or year 37 of Artaxerxes I has been corrupted, or, most probably, year 7 of Darius II was meant (417 BC)). It was only with Ezra that Judaism, with its famous law, was really founded, and the Jerusalem temple got any authority, even if other returners had already established the temple—and that is questionable.

The sign of Persian influence appears in *Jeremiah*. Rab-Mag was the chief of the Magi. The books of the *Old Testament* like *2 Chronicles*, *Ezra* and *Deutero-Isaiah* betray a strong influence of Persia. Thus they even use the reigns of Persian kings as the basis of their chronology. Waterhouse (WAT-ZOR) says some passages "appear as much Persian as Hebraic." [The origins of Greek philosophy](#), which also emerged in the time of the Persians, must also be considered likely to have something to do with Zoroastrian ideas.

The Persian king Cyrus was seen by the Jews as a Saviour. He ordered the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, as we know from inscriptions as well as the *Old Testament* and was much admired by the prophet, Isaiah. The end of *2 Chronicles* has exactly the same verses as the beginning of *Ezra*:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, he is the God which is in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:1-3)



Cyrus in this citation does not simply say that Yehouah charged him to build him a house at Jerusalem, but the “God of Heaven,” none other than Ahuramazda, identified as Yehouah (Lord), but he then calls him (or the author of *Ezra* does) Yehouah (Lord) “God of Israel.” After the exile the “God of Israel,” Yehouah, has the title, the “God of Heaven” declaring him to be Ahuramazda. The Cyrus Vase found on a hill in Babylon confirms Cyrus in the same role in Babylon in its inscription:

The Great Lord Marduk regarded favourably the salvation, that is, the saviour of his people, his victorious work, and his righteous heart, going towards his city Babylon as a friend and companion at his side.

Scholars have tried to pretend that the reference to Marduk rather than Ahuramazda is a careless error, but, if so, it was extremely careless since these inscriptions were stamped on to thousands of clay objects with a cylinder seal. The vase inscription says Cyrus took Babylon without bloodshed and thus was Marduk pleased!

Marduk the Great Lord made the honourable hearts of the people of Babylon incline to me because I was daily mindful of his worship... May all the gods whom I have brought into their cities pray daily before Bel and Nabu for long life for me... and speak to my Lord Marduk for Cyrus the king who fears thee and Cambyses his son.

As far as the Babylonians were concerned, and evidently Cyrus concurred, Marduk was Ahuramazda. Zoroastrianism was monotheistic. Ahuramazda was the only god, but there was nothing that proclaimed that Ahuramazda was god’s only name. Cyrus was happy to adapt all the “Great Lords” of his empire into the one Great Lord. All the king was doing in setting up a temple in Jerusalem was making Yehouah into Ahuramazda as well.

The Persian and Jewish gods are described in identical terms. In *Isaiah* it is:

I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens.

*Isa* 45:12



The inscription of Darius at Behistun has:

A great god is Ahuramazda, who made the earth and the heaven yonder, and made man.



What is more, the scriptures agree with the Persian kings like Cyrus that the “Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth” because the Persian inscriptions state it clearly:

As Ahuramazda created this earth, he gave it over to me. (Darius, Behistun)

In *Isaiah* 45, the author is at pains to be clear that the god is explicitly Yehouah, the God of Israel, but that would not have fazed Cyrus or Darius who would nevertheless have seen God as Ahuramazda but, providing that his laws are obeyed, would not have been particular about what the locals called him. More important is Yehouah's affirmation that, unlike Ahuramazda, he was the god of both light and dark, good and evil—probably the touch of a Maccabæan redactor's pen:

I form the light and create the darkness, I make peace and create evil.

*Isa* 45:7

After a lot more trouble, the plan began to work excellently under the Persians, but then broke down under the Greeks. The worshippers of Yehouah had become so convinced by the god set up by the Persians that they would not condone the gods of the Greeks, and the Maccabees—goaded by the Egyptians and Romans—insisted that the Jewish God was a jealous, vengeful and bloodthirsty God of fear to stir the Jews to rebellious protest against their Greek enemies.

## **Nehemiah and Ezra**

The Yehudim that returned came with the propaganda that Cyrus was restoring an old god when he was creating a temple to Ahuramazda, dressed in local habit. But the “returners” had to persuade the ordinary untaught and unskilled Israelites who were not transported and retained their original beliefs that the change was what they wanted. The locals in the Judæan hills did not recognize the new god and rejected him and his followers. They opposed Zerubabel and his “returners”.

The construction of the temple designed by the Persian king, Cyrus, was delayed by both political and physical means. These Yehudim that had not been exiled eventually built their own temple on Mount Gerizim and dismissed Jerusalem from their *Pentateuch*. They were the original Israelites but were dismissed as Samaritans and the “Men of the Land” or Am ha-Eretz, by the worshippers of the new Yehouah. Under the Greeks, further factionalism occurred, the pro-Greek faction placed in power becoming the Sadducees supposedly following the line of the temple priests named after the mythical Zadok (Greek, Sadduc) and rejecting Persian ideas, but the pro-Persian faction called themselves Hasids, the Pious Ones, before splintering into Pharisees (Persians) and Essenes (Saviours or Deliverers).

Eventually the Persian governor had to call the “returners” from exile to order for plotting, and work on the temple was suspended, if it had ever started, after only two years. Darius sternly ordered that the “returners” get to work on their task as decreed by Cyrus. He appointed a High Priest to stimulate events and will have sent a fresh batch of “returners” to motivate the others. The temple was supposedly finished in the sixth year of Darius, 516 AD.

About half a century later, Artaxerxes I put down another Egyptian revolt, even though the Egyptians were helped by their Athenian Greek allies, hoping to secure a reliable supply of wheat. The Greek fleet was soundly beaten, showing that their victory over Xerxes at Salamis was not through any intrinsic superiority. Nevertheless, Athens was now just reaching its peak under Perikles, and they forced important concessions from the Persians. The region of Asia Minor west of the Halys was demilitarized, giving the Greek Asian cities a lot of freedom and cultural exchange between Greece and Persia actually improved. Herodotus travelled and wrote his histories and Democritus, having met Babylonian scientists and mathematicians, worked out his atomic theory.

Between 445 and 397 BC, Artaxerxes was handing out Mesopotamian estates to Persian princes after transporting their owners, native Babylonians, to distant parts. At the same time, he was promoting the cult of the Magian priests at the expense of the native divinity Bel-Marduk. Doubtless some of these Babylonians were deported to Judea.

The biblical missions of Nehemiah and Ezra backed by the Achaemenian imperial government were to make the Canaanite population accept the idea of the universal god under the local name “Yehouah.” Artaxerxes had to send Nehemiah from Persia about 445 BC to make the Jews adopt the new god. His condition to the “returners” to retain the support of Persia was absolute loyalty, the condition placed upon all deportees. Nehemiah has a banquet for 150 rulers (*Neh* 5:17). Guests attending the Persian king’s banquets had to bathe and dress in white, and this must have been the requirement for Nehemiah’s banquet. This will have been the source of the Essenes’ rule of conduct at their meals, notionally attended as they were by the messiah, the king. Ezra, another servant of the Persian king who had been born and educated as a divine reader in Babylon, was sent to Yehud from Babylon. Despite the temple supposedly having been built, it appears it had not—most of the natives of the hill country did not want to change and were obstructing the foreign cult being imported. The king (Darius II not Artaxerxes) was concerned that the hill country must be pacified as neighbours and potential allies of the rebellious Egyptians.

He instructed Ezra to appoint magistrates and judges who would keep Judah in the laws of its new god, Yehouah. Ezra had to “to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances” (*Ezra* 7:10) and to see if the people of Judaea were “agreeable to the law of God”. Ezra laid down the law to a people already bound by the supposedly 1000 year old law of Moses! Had the Jews forgotten the law of Moses? Did they need to be taught civilisation by the Persians? He was not teaching any religion that the people of Judaea knew. It is a clear indication that the law of Moses was the law of Ezra.

In *Nehemiah* 8, Ezra read from the book of law which neither Hebrew speakers nor Aramaic speakers could understand—the words had to be translated by priests. What language was Ezra reading? Not Hebrew. What book of law was it? He was plainly reading laws from like the *Vendidad*. Widespread religious conversion occurs according to *Ezra* 6:19-21 and *Nehemiah* 10:28-29. Why would Jews need to convert to Judaism? What were they converting to? The answer is Zoroastrianism and the book being read was probably a Persian lawbook like the *Vendidad* written in Persian. According to a rabbinic legend, a gemara also attributes to Ezra the change from Hebrew script to the square Aramaic script.

The distinction between clean and unclean animals in *Leviticus* and *Ezekiel* was from the *Vendidad*, which explains it. The *Vendidad* purification rituals are identical in the *Pentateuch* and the older *Vendidad*. Ezra also introduced the new Festival of Booths in the seventh month, the Zoroastrian holiday of Ayathrem, and must

have invented the scriptural myth to justify it. In about 400 BC, the *Old Testament* was put in written form when Jerusalem was still under the power of the Persians. Waterhouse truly writes:

There are so many things shared between the theologies of Persia and Israel that they cannot be assigned to general community of ideas.

Imprecise understanding of the laws being transmitted, their adaption to local circumstances and subsequent evolution under the Greeks and the Maccabees will allow for the differences between the Zoroastrian law and the Jewish law, but many remarkable similarities that remain testify to their common origin, and that cannot have been Jewish.

Zoroaster had subjected the Iranian tribal gods to the one Most High God, Ahuramazda. Ezra, at the behest of the Persian king, did the same in Yehud. Around 400 BC, with Jerusalem under the power of the Persians, Ezra and Nehemiah invented the Jewish scriptures. They wrote out Jewish mythology, incorporating a multitude of laws intended to make the Jewish gods into a single monotheistic god akin to Ahuramazda, and the Jews into a civilized people. Where any Persian concepts appear in the Jewish scriptures at a time before the captivity, they have been written anachronistically into the account by the post-exilic priesthood.

## **Judaism and Zoroastrianism**

Zoroastrianism was the source of Jewish monotheism, brought from “exile” on the “return” (*Isa* 43:10-13; *Jer* 10:1-16). Even Christian scholars note that the concept of Ahuramazda is closer to that of the Jewish God than that of any other eastern religion. The old Israelites of the Palestinian hill country were not monotheists. Before it was remodelled by the Persians, Judaism was polytheistic. The Jewish god was a tribal god—one of many Semitic tribal gods, generally called *Lord*, which in Semitic languages is Baal or Bel. A tribal god, of necessity, implies polytheism since there are other tribes. The idea of the covenant with one tribe, the Israelites, implies polytheism. In it God commands:

Thou shalt have no other gods before me,

*Ex* 20:3

admitting there were other gods. When the sages wrote down the holy books, they introduced ideas from Zoroastrianism. Spentas became angels and divas became demons (devils). Their tribal god became a universal God but one which still favoured his Chosen People.

In Judaism, *Deutero-Isaiah* contains the first monotheistic declarations in the Bible, the first expression of universalism which has no antecedent in it, approaching the monotheism and universalism of Zoroaster just when the Persian King Cyrus appears as an apparent saviour for the Jews! A universal God must be monotheistic because only he is worshipped. A local god is only one of many. The Persians introduced the idea of a perfect, loving, universal god—Ahuramazda by any other name—whose earthly presence and saviour was the king of kings, the king of the Persian Empire. Thucydides (460-399 BC, *War* 4:50), quoting the words of the Persian, Artaphernes, who was captured taking a message from the Persian king to Sparta, confirms the idea of the king as saviour:

The best of our many good customs is that we revere the king and worship him as the image of God, *God who saves everything*.

Over 100 Persian words appear in the Judaeo-Christian bible. One of the last words uttered by Jesus on the cross was Persian (*Lk 23:43*). After the Persian conquest, Jerusalem became a Persian city in many respects. The threefold division of Persian society is reflected in Israel: priests, princes and Israelites.

It is an obvious and pressing fact that much exilic matter is present in many places in our present so-called pre-exilic texts. We might indeed be imperatively forced to doubt the uninfluenced existence of any pre-exilic texts at all.

L H Mills

## **Ahuramazda and Yehouah**

The Persian religion was as monotheistic as the Jewish religion it created—it wasn't! Judaism was never monotheistic and still is not, just as Zoroastrianism, however it might have been conceived by the Prophet, never ever was monotheistic. The Persians passed on the identical idea that they had about Ahuramazda—that he was the Most High God. The old gods were declared to be demons—but demons are gods, if gods are supernatural entities. And if there were demons as wicked spirits, there had to be angels as good spirits helping the good god. They had different levels of powers.

“Ahu” means life and forms part of the word Ahura which seems to equate with “living,” an obvious association with the sun (surya, asura, ahura), especially for people from cold climates. Here is another link with Yehouah, also said to mean “living,” from its supposed similarity to the first person singula of “to be.” Thus both Yehouah and Ahuramazda were understood as “living gods.” The title of Yehouah as the “Ancient of Days” equates with “Zrvani akarane,” “eternal time,” the Persian god Zurvan.

Both the Jewish and the Zoroastrian gods were ultimately supreme, though temporarily were not. Ahuramazda had to battle with the Evil Spirit, Ahriman, throughout material history, and Yehouah had to battle with Satan. Satan, originally a servant of God, appointed by Him as His prosecutor, took on the role of Ahriman as the enemy of God. Satan is not equal in power to Yehouah, yet the supreme god cannot destroy the lesser one. This is effectively the relation between Ahuramazda and Angra Mainyu. The serpent in *Genesis* is considered to be Satan. Snakes in Zoroastrianism are of the Evil Creation and, according to the *Vendidad*, it is the first of the Evil Creation and so represents the face of evil in the material world!

The Zoroastrian scheme is more complete because it offers an explanation of the two spirits, but Yehouism does not. Mazdayasnaism has many lesser spirits just as Yehouism has its angels, but the Evil Spirit in Zoroastrianism is equal to Ahuramazda in all respects except foresight.

The attempt to solve the problem in Judaism and Christianity with the fall from grace is no answer. In Zoroastrianism, Asmodeus (Aesmadaeva) is an angry spirit (Y 28:7) that led to the fall of man (Y 30:3) by offering humanity the worst mind. Some are tempted, but those of good mind will defeat the demons in the end. Yehouism has Satan as a fallen angel, but angels are supposed only to be lesser spirits, so there is no explanation of why Yehouah does not simply finish him off. Moreover, Yehouah, like Ahuramazda had foresight,

so knew that they would fall from grace when he made them, just as he knew Adam and Eve would. Yet he went ahead and created entities that he knew would fall into evil. That is just the same as creating evil, because there was no need to do it once he had foreseen it.

Judaism and Christianity want a single absolute God, but the legends they acquired in the Persian period are of two equal gods, and they consequently get into theological tangles, that Zoroastrianism does not have. Indeed, to all intents and purposes, many Christian sects today believe in an original Evil Spirit equal to God, at least on the earthly plane.

Ahuramazda was the author only of good, whereas Yehouah has to be the author of both good and ill (*Isa 45:7*), the angels but also the demons, that have such power in the *New Testament*. Did the Jews believe that the evil spirits, Satan and the Baals, railed against in the scriptures, were actually created by Yehouah? Much of the scriptures show that they were equal gods to Yehouah and the favourite name of God in the bible is not simply Yehouah but Yehouah of the Gods! YHWH Elohim. In places in the bible “elohim” stands alone and is translated as “the gods”. Furthermore, the prophets consider the Baals as real gods, not simply idols.

Any attempt to produce evil from somewhere outside of the control of Yehouah makes the Jews and Christians just as dualist as the Iranians. No one does, though Satan is often characterized as the “god of the world” while Yehouah is the “god of heaven”, especially by Christians, whose Gnosticism still shines through, as if they were equal gods with different realms. This is just a distortion of the Zoroastrian belief that the material world has been corrupted by the Evil Creation. But in Zoroastrianism, it was fundamentally still the creation of the Good God, not the Evil One. The Evil Spirit could only contend with the Good God on the material plane in Mazdaism, but in Yehouism the fight was continued on the heavenly or cosmic plane. Again the Zoroastrian cosmogony is more complete.

Ahuramazda is the Creator (Y 29:4), is omniscient (Y 31:13-14), is the lawgiver (Y 1:11), is a teacher (Y 31:5, 32:13), will establish a kingdom (Y 28:4) and is for the poor (Y 34:3):

O Mazda, Thine is the kingdom, and by it thou bestowest the highest of blessings on the right-living poor. (Y 53:9)

He is the friend, protector and strengthener and is unchangeable (Y 31:7), is the Judge (Y 43:4) and the day of Judgement (Y 43:5-6). He invites Zoroaster to proselytize:

With the tongue of thy mouth dost thou speak, that I might make all the living believers. (Y 31:3)

Herodotus says the Persians valued, almost above all, the fathering of children perhaps because the Persian nobility were a limited body of people. This would explain the biblical command to multiply, the reason being the same—that the “returners” were not populous, and the temple needed bodies to attend it and feed the priesthood who would collect the tribute. Along with it went a practical disdain of homosexuality, putting Persians and Jews at the opposite pole from Greeks and, under Christianity, rendering for two thousand years a natural aspect of sexuality as a sin.

Herodotus also tells us that the Medes and Persians did not make images of their gods or temples or altars. He

is comparing the Persians with the Greeks who had a great fondness for elegant statues of gods and goddesses in equally elegant temples. Certain Achaemenid buildings are thought to have been fire temples, and open air altars with recesses apparently for the fires have been found, but the supposed temples remain doubtful. Herodotus adds that the Persians and Medes worshipped in the open air in high places or at the top of mountains and so addressed Ahuramazda in heaven directly, thus needing no temples, icons or statues.

Assyrian records show that no images were captured when Medes were defeated in battle or when Median towns surrendered. Persians made bas-reliefs rather than statues on their royal palaces sometimes of kings, their subjects and mythical animals but apparently not of gods. The typical winged fravashi image of Ahuramazda as found on the Behistun monument seems to belie Herodotus, but the monument was not, of course, a temple, and the Persians seem to have simply adopted the convention of the Assyrians for showing heavenly approval of their kings and the spirit of God as a witness to national inscriptions. This winged disc or figure seems not to have been for knee bending purposes.

Thus even the absence of the god Yehouah in representation is an inheritance from the Persians, though the scriptural descriptions of the temple suggest the Jews *did* have a representation or representations of their god in the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem temple—it seems to have looked like the symbol of Ahuramazda on monuments!

## Eschatology

*Kings* and *Chronicles* are considered pre-Persian, but the term “Cities of the Medes” appears twice in *Kings*. These books are about the succession of worthy and unworthy kings of Israel and Judah, but amid their lives and deaths appear no surmises about their ultimate destination—in heaven or hell. God is depicted as contending with a generally unreliable people who persistently fall into worshipping gods called Baals and Asherahs that are really devils. The Ten Commandments contains no mention of a Last Judgement.

The religion of the ancient Canaanites knew of no Last Judgement.

The future existence of souls after death was as dim in the pre-exilic bible as it was in the older Greek classics—in fact this latter, the Greek immortality, seems to show rather the more of animation.

L H Mills

Before the fall of Jerusalem the concept of death was Sheol, a dark and dismal place with no memory of God. There is no clear mention of any hope of immortality before parts of second *Isaiah* that are obviously late. In the oldest Zoroastrian writings, the Gathas, dating to about 1000 BC, heaven—the Best Life—was already a reward for righteous living. After the Persian conquest the concepts of heaven and hell emerged in Judaism and the Jews had a doctrine of resurrection and judgement for all. The “dry bones” of *Ezekiel* recalls the Persian custom of leaving the dead to be picked by birds in towers, so that they do not defile the earth, after which they could be resurrected.

Zoroastrianism is the main document of our eschatology, a fact which should be taken everywhere for granted, as the slightest examination would confirm it.

L H Mills



The whole system of the Most High God, the angels, immortality, resurrection, judgement, heaven, hell and a saviour all appear in the Persian period when colonists in successive waves went to Palestine from places in Persia. There is no sign of such a sophisticated system before the Babylonian conquest, so it just arose with no native antecedents, or it had non-native antecedents.

From start to finish we have everywhere in Zoroastrianism, the main points of our eschatology. There was no other lore of the period of the oldest *Avesta* which so expressed the doctrines almost in modern terms.

L H Mills

2 *Kings* 22:8 and 22:13 purport to say that the book of the law was found in the reign of Josiah (622 BC) and that before then the Israelites, kings and priests had had no knowledge of the law. Even accepting it as it stands no traces of any previous law books of the Israelites could have remained, even if there had been some, so the Jewish religion could not have started until then, only 100 years before the Persians sent in colonists. It disproves the existence of literacy, and thereby disproves the existence of any grand temple. The temple would have had scribes to copy the holy books!

In fact, the book of the law was written by Persian colonists and retrojected into the reign of Josiah to give it some history, covering up the reality that it had been written by the “returners”.

## **Holy Spirits and Saviours**

Ahuramazda has a Holy Spirit that sometimes seems to be him and at other times seems to be independent. This is identical to the Holy Spirit of Yehouah that has the same characteristics. It is not the only spirit of Ahuramazda however—there are six others, making seven in all. Yehouah has seven archangels. In the *Book of Tobit* the seven spirits appear at Ragha, the Zoroastrian Holy City, and one of them is called Raphael, the Jewish archangel! Tobit also has the name of an Avestan demon, Asmodeus. *Zechariah* 4:10 speaks of “these seven” that are the eyes of the Lord, and earlier had been the imagery of seven lampstands that appears again in *Revelation*. There again also are the seven spirits of God.

Mithras appears in the Talmud as Mittron (Metatron). This angel is not mentioned as such in the scripture but is seen as the “Angel of the Presence”, a role that Mithras seemed to have in Persian religion, possibly accounting for Mithras replacing Ahuramazda in the Persian religion that came west. The “Angel of the Presence” is God himself appearing in a form that can be looked upon by humans beings without terminal sunburn. He is also “one whose name is like that of his master”. “Who is like God?” is the meaning of the name Michael. It confirms what might have seemed plain anyway, that Michael is Mithras.

In Zoroastrianism, a spotless virgin conceives from the preserved semen of Zoroaster when she bathes in the lake where it has been preserved, and remains a virgin because she is not penetrated. She thus becomes the virgin mother of the last Saoshyant or saviour. This is according to the Bundahish which is late, but the elements of it can be seen in parts of the *Avesta* (Y 13:142, 19:92, 13:62) so, although alteration cannot be counted out, some similar legends existed in the earlier period.

The Jewish Messiah became a Saviour similar to the Iranian Saoshyant, in the shape of a future King of Israel who would save his people from oppression. Apologists try to make out that the Jewish idea of a Saviour did not come from Persia but came from their anguish of exile in Babylon and the covenant relationship they had with Yehouah that promised them his protection if they remain righteous. Yet the whole argument is manifestly anachronistic.

The writers of the gospel of Matthew want to imply, through the introduction of the visiting Magi, that Jesus is the Saoshyant of the Zoroastrians, as well as the Christians. The Saoshyant:

...shall make the world progress unto perfection, and when it shall be never dying, nor decaying, never rotting, ever living ever useful, having power to fulfil all wishes, when the dead shall arise and immortal life shall come... (Y 19:83).

Compare this with *Isaiah* 26:19:

Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

The Persians, like the post-exilic Jews, believed the soul remained with the body for three days—a dead person was not really dead until the fourth day when the soul had departed. This explains why Jesus was to rise on the third day. It also shows that the raising of Lazarus was an afterthought. The greatness of the miracle of raising Lazarus in the fourth gospel is that he had been dead for *four* days. His soul had departed and he was beyond recall. One would have thought that Jesus would have saved this exceptional miracle for himself.

## Purity

In their religious habits, as described by Herodotus, the Persians were especially concerned with purity.

G M Cook

Here we have the origins of the Jewish purity laws. The cleanliness laws regarding animals given by Ezra to the Jews are recorded in *Leviticus* and *Ezekiel* where they are not explained. They are explained in the *Vendidad*. Purification rituals are identical in the *Pentateuch* and the older *Vendidad*. Von Gall in *Brasileia tou Theou*, 1926, catalogues the Jewish laws taken from the Persians.

The Jews would not burn their dead, supposedly because it was a desecration of the dead, but really because their teachers, the Persians, did not want to desecrate the flame. The Jewish priests could not even approach a grave, the defilement of death is so strong, and had to be buried in the front row of a cemetery so that their relatives did not have to pass other graves to visit those of their family. If the Jews considered dead bodies as so thoroughly unclean, why should they have been bothered about desecrating them by cremation? In common sense, such a vile pollution ought to be purified by fire, since fire was regarded as the ultimate purifier. What we have is an imperfect rationalization from the Persian refusal to contaminate fire.

The dead bodies of Jews were put into a sepulchre to decay, and later the bones were collected into ossuaries. The sepulchre or tomb served the same purpose as the Silent Towers of the Persians in which they left their

dead to be picked by birds, so as not to contaminate any of the elements. In both cases, the soft parts of the dead body were allowed to disperse and the bones collected later. Both also treated the corpse with waxes or unguents but did not go so far as to embalm them, like the Egyptians.

The Persians would not burn sacrifices to Ahuramazda—that too desecrating the sacred flame. Zoroaster seems to have forbidden sacrifices anyway, but they never seem to have been successfully stopped. But pollution of the sacred living flame was not allowed. Sacrifices were not burnt but boiled in the open air to offer a sweet scent to God. Sure enough, offering a sweet savour to god rather than sacrificing also appears in the Jewish scriptures, and was followed by the Essenes into gospel times suggesting that sacrificing was a post-Persian adaptation, or perhaps a reversion to the ancient practice of the priests of Baal, from post-Alexandrine Greek influences.

Ministering to the sacred flame also seems to have gone in post-Persian times. Strabo describes the Magians of Cappadocia, where they were popular, ministrating to the sacred flame with bunches of herbs in their hands and with their mouths covered so as not to pollute it. The Magi had an important position in society but were not of the highest class and were not represented on Persian royal reliefs. Once the Persian ruling elite had been destroyed by Alexander, the Magians became more important in some of the former occupied lands of the Persians.

The Magians known to the Greeks and referred to by Herodotus, Plato, Strabo, and Plutarch, were not orthodox followers of the Persian prophet. They were the priests of certain *religious colonies* established in the west of Iran during the age of the Achaemenids, from Mesopotamia to the Aegean, and existing there up to the Christian epoch.

A C Bouquet

Herodotus, writing about 450 BC, called the Magoi a “tribe” of the Medes, and Strabo called them a “tribe” of the Persians. Is it mere coincidence that the Levites are a “tribe” of the Israelites and end up as a Jewish priestly caste?—Jewish Magi! A tribe is a group of people linked by blood—a clan—and both the Jewish and the Zoroastrian priesthoods were inherited. Both habitually wore white, whereas Iranian warriors wore purples, reds and other bright colours.

Few scholars would deny that the Jews had many of the central features of their religion from Zoroastrianism. They obtained from Zoroastrianism their beliefs in:

- ☐ uncleanness and pollution;
- ☐ angels and demons and their hierarchies—angelology and demonology;
- ☐ the soul’s immortality;
- ☐ the Last Judgment and the doctrine of the millennium;
- ☐ rewards and punishments after death;
- ☐ the heavenly book in which human actions are inscribed;
- ☐ eschatology and resurrection;
- ☐ the final purification of the earth;
- ☐ a future state of a kingdom of God on earth;
- ☐ heaven;

☐ hell.

The idea of a covenant with god was imposed on the “returners” from exile, who had to impose it on the native people of the Palestine hills. The Persians are repeatedly shown on their sculptures making covenants with Mazda or Marduk. Persian held covenant relationships to be binding as an aspect of truth and had Asha and Mithras to guard them. Both saviour and covenant came from the Persians, the saviour was Cyrus and the covenant was with Ahuramazda, the God of Heaven, renamed Yehouah for the Jews, whose representative on earth was the Persian king.

It is irrefutable that Judaism is a corruption of Zoroastrianism, and it ought to be widely taught as Professor Lawrence Mills repeatedly said a hundred years ago. That no attempt has been made by the Jewish and Christian religions, by teachers or by scholars, they are proved to be dishonest, and one can only conclude that they are intent on perpetuating the lies that their religions are original. If they are correct that there is one supreme God of goodness, they might be surprised to find he does not have the name they expect, and puts a greater value on truth than they do.

### **A Law for the Priests**

Heavy taxation by the Persians impoverished the people of even rich countries like Babylonia. Herodotus, before about 480 BC, says the Babylonians were rendered so poor they had to prostitute their daughters. So, having a system of control of the population through the privileged class of priests was essential. The Babylonian priests brought astronomy to its peak under Persian rule, showing that they had plenty of money and time for arcane studies. The Jerusalem variety of holy spongers were equally privileged.

The law, for all its supposed basis in God’s justice, served as the mechanism by which the priests squeezed every last shekel out of the poor. The priests were entitled to:

- ☐ every sin and trespass offering (*Neh* 18:9);
- ☐ parts of other offerings (*Lev* 7:30-34);
- ☐ the first fruits of the
  - ☐ corn harvest,
  - ☐ the grape harvest,
  - ☐ the fig harvest,
  - ☐ the pomegranate harvest,
  - ☐ the olive harvest, and
  - ☐ the honey harvest (*Dt* 26:1);
- ☐ in addition, “all the best of the oil and all the best of the vintage and corn” to make up between a sixtieth and a fortieth (*Num* 18:12);
- ☐ of the remainder, a tenth had to be set aside for the lesser but more numerous temple functionaries called Levites, and the temples had to give a tenth of this to the priests (*Num* 18:20);
- ☐ besides these, every twentieth loaf baked (*Num* 15:17);
- ☐ every firstborn calf or its value in cash (*Num* 18:15);
- ☐ a family’s first born son had to be “redeemed” at a month old by payment of 5 shekels (at least £50-100, about double in dollars) (*Num* 18:16)

- ❑ of any animal killed for a family's own consumption, "the shoulder, the two cheeks and the maw" (*Dt* 18:3);
- ❑ a proportion of the wool sheared from a sheep;
- ❑ any ox, ass, maidservant or manservant devoted to god (*Num* 18:14);
- ❑ any restitution made for an injustice went to the priest when the person wronged could not receive it (*Num* 5:5);

Just as in its daughter religion, Christianity, the tithes for the Jewish priests were extorted mainly by psychological power held by the priests through people's fear of divine wrath. As it says in *Ecclesiasticus*:

Fear the Lord and honour the priest, and give him his portion, as it is commanded thee: the firstfruits, and the trespass offering, and the gift of the shoulders, and the sacrifice of sanctification, and the firstfruits of the holy things.

*Ecc* 7:31

In the early days of the reformation, the people refused to co-operate because they rejected the Persian reforms, and Nehemiah and Malachi record them being taken to task (*Mal* 3:9; *Neh* 13:10). A few generations down the line when the reforms had taken root, prompt payment of the tithes was an important sign of piety! Attendance at church and rattling the platter or collection boxes with coinage plays the same role in Christianity. The apocryphal book of *Judith* tells us that the people were loathe to deny the priests their sanctified portions even during drought and famine (*Jud* 11:13).

Ezra's major reform was the prohibition of "foreign" wives. The ethnic people of Judah were thoroughly mixed, and it was the policy of successive emperors to mix the populations even more. In legend, Solomon had been the son of a Hittite woman, Bathsheba. Both ethnic and religious mixed marriages had been the common practice among the small population of mixed people of the hill country, so why should Ezra have been uncommonly bothered about an age old habit?

For the people there were no racial rules but worship of Yehouah was the deciding factor concerning whether anyone was a Jew. "Jews" or "Yehudim" means worshippers of Yehouah. For "foreign" read non-Jewish and you realize Ezra's complaint is that they are not worshippers of Yehouah. Ezra was not concerned about the *racial* purity of the people of Jerusalem but about their religious purity and the purity of the ruling caste of priests, the Jewish Magi. Marriages outside of Zoroastrianism violated Zoroastrian law (*Denkard* 3:80), so he purged from the priesthood any who could not prove that they were descended from purely Jewish families.

The Zoroastrians had the same distaste for the temptations of women as the Jews, to whom they gave it. A legitimate marriage in the Zoroastrian religion had to be between two Zoroastrians, performed by properly ordained Zoroastrian priests, and according to the Zoroastrian Ashirwad ceremony. The law given to the Jews was the same. To try to set up a pure religion, wives of the worshippers of Yehouah who worshipped some other god were banished.

For a Zoroastrian, illicit intercourse with a woman of a different religion was a dreadful sin, so heinous that the committer would not be resurrected at the End Time whatever good works they did in atonement. Consequently, men rarely did it. In the rare cases where they did, however, there was no excommunication—they would be

punished in God's Judgement. They were simply required not to pollute consecrated sites like fire temples.

If the woman became pregnant, several more sins might have been committed by the man. If she was menstrual, expiation of the sin by the man required extensive ritual cleansing. The Jews were taught the same neuroses about the uncleanness of menstruating females. If she was not menstruating, and not impregnated, the man still had to atone, because he had sinned by wasting semen—another sin that appears in the Jewish scriptures—onanism.

No law is specified for a Zoroastrian woman's physical relationship with a non-Zoroastrian male, probably because, if the woman remained in the Zoroastrian community, the child would naturally be brought up as a Zoroastrian by his mother and her family, and would not if she left to stay with the Pagan man.



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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 2. How Persia Created Judaism

### Persian Influences I

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#### The Later Persian Kings

Darius put his trust in the one good god of Zoroaster's revelation. Ammianus Marcellinus, from earlier unnamed sources, says that Darius replaced the heads of the priesthood by seven more cautious holy men, after they had tried to usurp the throne. The whole story is probably propaganda, and actually the Magi who supported Darius in what was his own successful coup were rewarded. Either way, a board or commission of seven Magi were the supreme religious authorities and located in the Persian capital. They consecrated a Persian king when he succeeded to the throne and suppressed heresy.

Xerxes, who succeeded his father in 486 BC, desecrated the great temple of Marduk in Babylon, slaying a priest and carried off the huge statue of the god, which was said to be of solid gold. His purpose was political, to destroy the god who was traditionally the protector of Babylon and would serve as the focus of a separatist movement and revolt, but Xerxes had such confidence in Ahuramazda that he feared no reprisals from Marduk. Xerxes proves that the Persian kings were religious zealots not pussy cats as Christians and Jews want us to believe from a reading of the bible. They rewarded collaboration and punished defiance. Herodotus and Cicero report that Xerxes destroyed the temples on the Acropolis. Many historians disbelieved it until the discovery of an inscription at Persepolis in which Xerxes boasts of his conquest of Greece, of his godliness in destroying the temples on the Acropolis in which the Greeks had worshipped devils, and in commanding them to worship them no longer:

There was a place in which devils were formerly worshipped. There, by the help of Ahura Mazda, I demolished that lair of the devils and I issued an edict, "You shall not worship devils." And in the very place in which devils had once been worshipped, I piously and with Righteousness worshipped Ahura Mazda.

The Persians also destroyed the Greek temples at Branchidae, Naxos, Abae and other places not reported. They spared Delphi because the priests there advised the Greeks to yield to the Persians. In fact, the Greeks prevented Xerxes from conquering Europe, if that had been his aim, but the theology of Darius and Xerxes seems not to have altered to the time of Darius II, the king who intervened in the Peloponnesian War and died in 405 BC.

The religion's centre of gravity shifted to Babylon in the fifth century. There the Magi would have come into direct contact with the cult of the god Marduk, who might have been the model for the revival of Mithras. The Zoroastrian holy men in Babylon also found themselves in the world's capital of astrology. It was a superstition which at that time, and indeed for many centuries thereafter, could plausibly claim to be a scientific observation of the heavens, and thence the world. Chaldaean astromancy was taken up by the Magi.

The Jewish temple was "completed" (again!) between 445 BC and 417 BC, the Persian governors and priests

in Jerusalem thereby causing a great schism in the worship of Yehouah. The native Israelites, the Samaritans who, under Persian coercion it seems, had accepted the law as the Torah, built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, and Jerusalem is insignificant in their *Pentateuch*. At a later date when the temple was established, the Persian tradition became the “orthodox” position of the Pharisees or Persian faction—Pharisee, Parsee, Parsi—which survived the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD as Rabbinism! The Sadducees were nothing to do with the original worship of Yehouah or they would have been Samaritans. They were a Hellenized faction that tried to reject Persian influences (“no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit.” Acts 23:8) in favour of more civilized Greek practices.

In the wider empire, the administrative structures erected by Darius had been neglected and the Satraps were out of control and became local monarchs. Nehemiah’s building of the walls of Jerusalem sounds unlikely to have been authorized by the king of kings and might show that Nehemiah was preparing to declare UDI in Judah—whence the complaint from the Samaritan governor about this activity.

When Artaxerxes II came to the throne the empire was in turmoil. Bithynia, Caria, Lydia, Lycia, Pisidia, Pamphilia, Cilicia, all asserted their independence in Asia Minor and so did Cyprus, Syria and Phoenicia. Egypt was not to be left out and revolted, destroying the temple to Yehouah at Elephantine, evidently a symbol to them of Persian occupation. The temple serviced the garrison of Jewish soldiers permanently stationed there. Aramaic papyri discovered there prove that the colony was pro-Persian, the document being a copy of the inscription on the monument of Darius at Behistun. At this point, Ezra will have replaced Nehemiah in the true order of events.

Darius II’s son, Artaxerxes II, the king of the *Anabasis*, worships a Trinity: Ahura Mazda, Anahita (the Virgin, “Undeified”), and Mithras. He promulgated the cult of the goddess, Anahita, and the empire was united from Sardis to Bactria under the cult of a Great Father and a Mother Goddess, who, together with Mithras, formed the trinity of father, mother and son. Traces persisted in Asia Minor until the time of Paul and helped Christianity to take root there so quickly. Roman sources give the source of western Mithraism as Cilicia in the south of Asia Minor, where Paul was traditionally born and brought up.

Anahita was the goddess of waters, and water was an element not to be defiled for Persians. Anahita will have retained her virginity by bathing in pure water, the message of the myth being that mortals should not defile a goddess. In a Greek myth, mentioned by Pausanias, Juno renewed her virginity by bathing in a magical fountain. Anahita was paradoxically identified with a Babylonian goddess and became Anaitis, a goddess who needed the restorative power of pure water, but was immensely popular. Aelian mentions a goddess who restored her virginity after every coitus by bathing in a fountain located between the upper Tigris and Euphrates, where Zoroastrians considered were some of their holy places. She must have been Anahita.

According to Berosus, Artaxerxes II not only introduced the worship of Anahita but set up statues of his gods, in defiance of Zoroaster’s explicit command that God was to be represented only by the flames of a sacred fire. The king’s son, Artaxerxes III, rejected Anahita and worshipped only Ahuramazda and Mithras. An ambiguity in the cuneiform script of an inscription of Artaxerxes III at Persepolis would make it possible to argue that he regarded Father and Son as one person, suggesting that the attributes of Ahuramazda were being transferred to Mithras, and suggesting another identity of Zoroastrianism and Christianity.

The strange story in the book of *Esther*, was probably written in its present form about 100 BC, as most of the

present *Old Testament* was. The Persian monarch, Ahasuerus (Xerxes), drops the queen, Vashti, and marries Esther, a Jewish woman. This alone is highly important. Neither Zoroastrianism nor Judaism permitted mixed marriages. The king must have regarded a Jewish woman as a Zoroastrian for the marriage to be legal! The implication here therefore is that Judaism and Mazdayasnaism were considered the same religion by the Persian prince and by the Jewish author. The closeness of the relationship between Israel and Persia is indicated by the Semitic words in the later, Pahlavic parts of the *Avesta*. No such intrusions are found in the *Yashts* and the *Vendidad* and obviously therefore not in the *Gathas*.

Esther's cousin and foster-father, Mordecai, warns the Persian monarch that people are plotting against him. A Persian Grand Vizier, Haman, who opposes Mordecai, convinces the monarch to decree death against Mordecai and other Jews in his empire, selected by lot, on a certain date. Esther intervenes, and the Grand Vizier is instead hanged (crucified?) and Mordecai is appointed Grand Vizier. Instead of being killed themselves, the Jews slay seventy-five thousand of their enemies.

[The legend](#) justifies a Jewish feast, the Feast of Lots, held at the Persian New Year. Yehouah has no role in the story, and the characters are all historically fictitious except for the king. Esther is the goddess Ishtar (Anahita). Mordecai means Marduk (Merodach), who we saw is Ahuramazda and therefore also Yehouah. Haman oddly enough is the king again in another guise (perhaps standing for the king of the old year) because the royal family name Achaemenides in Greek is Hakhamanish in Persian. The story is said to be based on a Persian tale about the shrewdness of Harem queens.

The description in the story of the parade through the streets in royal robes, and of mock combat, features in the Persian New Year celebrations, when the old year lost in mock combat to the New Year and was hanged or crucified. The Jews took this New Year celebration, like the rest of their religion, from the Persians and then had to find a reason for it—much as Christians found reasons for celebrating Pagan festivals as Christian holidays. Incidentally, the Persian and Jewish New years were at the spring equinox—Easter to us!

The Pagan Aryans seem to have divided the year into two seasons, a summer season from the spring equinox to the autumn equinox, and the winter from autumn to spring. The same practice is found in India, testifying to its Aryan origin. So, the Iranians had notable feasts in the spring and the autumn. The spring festival welcomed back the growth of herbage, and the autumn one was the Mithrakana, a harvest festival for the end of the current season and a fertility festival for the coming spring dedicated to Mithras. A sacrifice of a bull to Apollo was similarly made at the Athenian Bouphonia. It will be the source of the bull-slaying images in Roman Mithraism. However, since all domestic animals return to the Ox-soul, any could be used depending on the circumstances. With a different intention, it seems a bull was sacrificed to Anahita too, but here to promote human fertility. In Sasanian times, Mithrakana was the one time when the king could get drunk. Having settled, it seems they had two new years, one in the spring and one in the autumn, but they celebrated other festivals including the solstices. The Jews had different years too:

One the first day of Nisan is the beginning of the year for kings and festivals. On the first day of Elul is the beginning of the tithing of cattle. On the first day of Tishri for the beginning of years, and for the sabbatic years and the jubilee years, for the plants and the vegetables. On the first day of Shabat is the beginning of tree-fruit (Mishnah).

So the Jews had four new years, but the religious one in spring was the most important one in a theocracy, and Rosh ha-Shanah in the autumn preserved the old harvest festival, as the occasion when creation is judged by God. Zoroaster made the spring festival the important New Year for Zoroastrians, beginning on “No Roz,” New Day in Persian. In Zoroaster’s reforms the six seasonal feasts of the Pagan Iranian calendar were rededicated to the Amesha Spentas. A great fire festival was also held 100 days before the spring New Year and therefore in mid-winter, to nourish the sun and initiate his strengthening. The grand bonfire was also placed near a stream to warm its waters in anticipation of spring.

Some indications suggest that the Indians and Iranians saw the New Year as beginning in autumn, but since their festivals were all or mainly seasonal, they must have celebrated spring too. The Babylonian calendar began in Nisanu (Jewish, Nisan—March to April) at the corn harvest and required an “akitu” or ritual placing of the images of the gods from the temples to the outside of the city boundaries. It was therefore a festival full of pageantry lasting a week. The Persians seem to have copied the whole festival, although for them on the plateau it was at sowing time not harvest time, and they made it their New Year festival. The older autumn festival was rededicated to Mithras, the Babylonian festival to Shamash being held in October. A festival was also dedicated to Tiri in June when the festival of Tammuz was bewailed, because it was the start of the Babylonian dry season when plants died off in the heat. The link of Ishtar with both Tammuz and Nabu allowed the Iranians to see Tiri as Tammuz. All of this apparently preceded the reforms of Zoroaster, and were not among the Holy festivals he prescribed.

In Achaemenian times, Persian processions were led by an empty chariot drawn by white horses. It was for Ahuramazda. A similar habit is recorded in Urartu, but in Assyria, the chariot carried an image of the god, Ashur or Ishtar.

Herodotus says Persians had no temples, altars or statues of gods, and by Greek standards, that was true. Zoroastrian worship was *al fresco*—all altars in Persia being, usually in pairs, in open country—but, under the first Achaemenids, temples had appeared in Persia to preserve the sacred flame. Xenophon describes the procession, led by sun chariots, that took the sacrificial animals to the paired altars where they were sacrificed before the king.

The Iranians always used the winged disc which originated in Egypt as a symbol of Horus in the third millennium BC so Herodotus was only relatively correct about this, and from the time of Artaxerxes, statues of Anahita became popular. The many sun names like Surya, Asura, Ahura, Aura, Huar, Hor, Ra and words for gold (Aureus, Or) derived from its bright sun-like colour betray a common origin and perhaps the winged disc accompanied it. It spread through the near east in second millenium when Egypt was its most imperial. Standing for the pharaoh who was the sun god incarnate, it came to represent royalty and thence power. In Assyria a figure appears in the disc carrying a bow or a ring in one hand while saluting with the other. Bronze objects from Urartu had this symbol in a form thought close to that of Darius’s monument at Behistun, the earliest Persian example.

Artaxerxes II supervised the introduction of a new calendar, suggesting that he was consciously involved in religious innovation. The old calendar is unknown except that it had some intercalary days, and the original Persian names for the months had been changed to Babylonian names. The Babylonian calendar had been introduced into Egypt by Darius, and it seems that the modified calendar of Artaxerxes was based on the

Babylonian one. The changes then might simply have been to change the names of the days and months to Zoroastrian ones, and possibly to fix some of the feast days. The Babylonian calendar had 360 days of twelve months of 30 days. It was obviously no accident that the number of days in a year equalled the number of degrees in a heavenly cycle. The shortfall from the full 365 days was made up by intercalation of the odd days. The Persian calendar was the same because Artaxerxes was reported to have had 360 concubines, one for each day of the year. Presumably his wives were intercalated!

In this scheme the months and even the days on the month had names taken from yazatas. The tenth month, December to January, was the month of Ahuramazda, but Mithras had the seventh month (September to October) when he had a great autumn festival.

Artaxerxes III was more ruthless and subjugated Egypt again and restored order in the empire. Isocrates appealed to the Greeks to stop squabbling and unite against the Persians. It was Philip of Macedon who heard this call. The Macedonians were not ethnically Greeks but had adopted Greek culture and were not exhausted by centuries of internal strife as the Greeks were. The Empire was looking strong under Artaxerxes III and the Athenians sought a separate peace though Philip wanted to stall. Safety necessitated that the Athenians be secured by conquest and so he and his son, Alexander, finished Athens off in 338 BC.

The last of the Persian kings was Darius III Codomannus (335-330 BC). Josephus says the Samaritan religion was reformed by someone called Manasseh at this time. Despite the antagonism between the Jews and the Samaritans, Nehemiah informs us that the noble priestly houses of Judah had many bonds of friendship with the Samaritan noble houses. According to *2 Kings* 17, they had a religion of Yehouah but of other gods also. It sounds closer to the original religion of the Israelites.

In fact, the author of *2 Kings* tells us that the Assyrians had carried off the inhabitants of Israel and replaced them by deportees from the north of Abarnahara, who brought in their own gods and so did not “fear the Lord.” The Assyrian king sent a priest of Yehouah to instruct the deportees in the religion of the land.

The puzzling aspect of it all is that these people were supposedly not Israelites, so why should they have been bound by Yehouah’s covenant with the Israelites? The truth is, of course, that not all the Israelites had been transported out by the Assyrians. Indeed, the story suggests that the Assyrian king was doing what Cyrus and Nabonidus did later—he sent a priest to train the natives in the proper worship of the “god of the land.” Here we might have the origin of the earliest stories of “return” in the bible—the “return” of Abraham and his family who came from just that part of the Assyrian empire.

They seemed to take only partial notice of their instructor, if we are to believe the scriptural account, for they continued to worship their own gods as well as Yehouah, doubtless, the gods of the fathers! As in Judah, it worked only partially, and the Assyrians did not keep power long enough to enforce it.

The Persians doubtless aimed to transform worship to the Lord of Heaven in Israel as well as Judah, but the Samaritans accepted it more readily having been primed by the work of the Assyrians. If the Samaritans more readily accepted the Torah and abandoned the old polytheism, there was no need for all the Persian propaganda that had to be published as prophetic pseudepigraphs to show the Am ha Eretz the error of their ways. Thus none of this got into the Samaritan bible.

*Nehemiah* 13:28 has it that the son of the Jewish High Priest, Joiada, married the daughter of Sanballat, the Samaritan governor, and so Nehemiah expelled him. Some commentators think that this young man reformed the Samaritan religion, introducing the Pentateuch and temple worship on Mount Gerizim, and so equates with the Manasseh of Josephus, though the dates are a century out. The Sanballat of Nehemiah is confirmed by letters from the temple at Elephantine dated 407 BC in which two sons are mentioned, each having a name ending in lah, indicating that Sanballat worshipped Yehouah. This early date makes Josephus wrong, but Sanballat might have been a title so, there were probably successive ones.

The Samaritans murdered the Macedonian governor. Samaria was destroyed by Alexander in retaliation, and Alexander made Samaria into a military colony occupied by Macedonian veterans. The Jews were delighted.

### **Alexander and the Persian Heritage**

Persia and Greece were rivals to influence the world, Persia by a political empire and commerce and Greece by a cultural empire and commerce. Only political empires stop at boundaries so the Greek sphere and the Persian sphere always overlapped considerably, geographically in Asia Minor, but Greek traders, artisans, and soldiers and generals as mercenaries, moved around the Persian Empire. The Persian rulers were far sighted and sponsored Babylonian science. Naburimanni, an astronomer at the time of Darius, calculated tables of lunar eclipses that were more accurate than those of Ptolemy or even Copernicus.

Furthermore, Kidinnu, another astronomer in the fourth century BC, two centuries before Hipparchus, discovered the precession of the equinoxes and calculated the length of the year accurate to 7 minutes 16 seconds. The discovery of the precession of the equinoxes gave authority to the Persian view of the universal god as a sun beyond the sun—a god beyond the heavens that moved the heavens themselves! This became the basis of Platonic philosophy and the beliefs of the Mithraists.

After Alexander, the Persian religion was left with no political base, so information from earlier sources is especially valuable in knowing the nature of Zoroastrianism originally. Unfortunately, Magian ceremonies were held without anyone not of the faith permitted to observe, not at first for any reason of secrecy, but for purity reasons. Non-believers were impure, or at least likely to be impure. Greeks reporters were therefore dependent on what the Magi told them or translated for them from their sacred books. The Magi were keen on proselytizing, but they were subject to a government ministry which directed religious affairs, and this ministry will have had its own political agenda, doubtless with the syncretistic aims of making it easier for collaborating foreigners to associate with the True Belief.

The most important effect the Persians have had on the world is from their policy of creating new local cults on the model given by Zoroaster but based on an old existing cult. They set up the cult of Yehouah in the temple in Jerusalem based on the universal god, Ahuramazda. Their aim was to present the emperor, known as the “king of kings,” as the representative approved of the Universal God on earth. The Universal God was therefore the “king of the king of kings.” Yehouah has this very title (the Alenu Prayer), a title that we can hardly expect even liberal Persian kings to tolerate unless they were happy that Yehouah was Ahuramazda! The Jewish scriptures are copper plated evidence of the success of this Persian policy. Cyrus is incessantly praised.



The Rev G F McClear, sometime warden of St Augustine's, Canterbury, writes in his *New Testament History*:

As subjects of the Persian kings, the Jews were eminent for their loyalty and good faith. While Egypt, Cyprus, Phoenicia, and other dependencies of the Persian crown, were frequently in rebellion, the Jews remained steadfast in their allegiance to the "Great King," and increased rapidly alike in wealth and numbers.

This fidelity to the Persians even led Jaddua the High Priest to defy Alexander for a time. As Alexander approached, having sieged and razed Tyre, the priest was lucky enough to have a dream telling him to greet Alexander! He garlanded the city and went forth in his priestly finery to welcome the conqueror. Alexander was as shrewd as Cyrus, however, and fell prostrate before the priest in adoration at the holy name inscribed on his tiara (a Persian head dress), and declared he had seen it all in a vision. In fact, he must have been fully aware of the loyalty of the Jews and of the reasons for their loyalty. He offered to bestow on the Jews any privilege they might select. McClear concludes:

They requested that the free enjoyment of their lives and liberties might be secured to them, as also to their brethren in Media and Babylonia...

Alexander agreed, but note that there were enough Jews not only in Babylonia but also at the heart of the Persian empire, in Media, to merit a special mention. These were the three lands whose gods, albeit of different names, the Persians certainly considered as "the God of Heaven".

From these political manoeuvres came Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all the important patriarchal religions. The Persians and Greeks rather than the Jews and the Greeks were the founders of the western world.

Alexander's burning and vandalism of Persepolis has always been considered inexplicable. He had read his history and Alexander aimed to do what Cyrus and Darius had done. He was always generous to enemies who yielded readily or caused him little trouble. He burnt Tyre for forcing him into a long siege but otherwise burning cities was out of character. The Persians had surrendered readily after their major defeat at Issus in 333 BC and Alexander's campaign in the west.

Darius III repeatedly offered terms to Alexander, increasingly generous terms, virtually amounting to surrender, but Alexander refused. He overcame token resistance at Gaugamela and the Persians folded. He entered Persepolis and dallied there for four months, offering to train 3000 Persian princes in the techniques of the Greeks, before destroying the city. It seems so odd to some historians that they say it must have been an accident caused by drunken carousing, of which Alexander was fond. Was it a deliberate act of vandalism because the Greek scholars that Alexander took with him found the essence of Greek scholarship already in the sacred writings of the Persians, showing the Greeks as well as the Jews were indebted to their enemies?

In the east, Iran lost Arachosia and Gandhara under Seleucus I to the Indian Mauryan empire. These lands of ancient Iranian settlement, had been re-colonized in Achaemenid times. Inscriptions there from the third century BC were written in good Persian chancellery Aramaic. They also could speak Northwestern Prakrit, and these eastern Iranians will have passed Zoroastrianism into India where it inspired Mahayana Buddhism.

In the second-third centuries AD, Bardesanes wrote of “the descendants of Persians who lived out of Persia” as being still numerous and maintaining their traditional customs in Egypt, Phrygia, and Galatia. Zoroastrian sanctuaries still existed in Asia Minor, the oldest being at Zela in Pontic Cappadocia, founded in the sixth century BC by Cyrus the Great or his generals. As the Iranians worshipped in high places, the sanctuary was on a hill, banked up higher and encircled by a wall. Later this was one of the temples to Anahita, frequently attested in Asia Minor, and which show the Persian influence there. In the fourth century AD, many villages in Cappadocia were still populated by Iranians.

Traces of them in Egypt are mainly names only, but a mithraion—presumably a Zoroastrian sanctuary—is mentioned from the third century BC in Fayoum, and “Basilios the Persian” practiced in his community some form of Zoroastrianism in the fourth century AD. Temples let expatriate Iranian communities keep their identity by offering them centers for religious and social life. They also attracted pilgrims for their annual feast-days, bringing together Iranians from elsewhere. Persian Sibyllist oracles were also known, conveying Persian prophecies and expectations.

Christians suppressed Persian temples in western Asia Minor when they gained power after the third century AD, but Khusrau I Anushirvan negotiated with a Byzantine emperor, as late as the sixth century, to have fire temples rebuilt, probably in Cappadocia.

## Temple and Diaspora

The Persians seemed to have meant the Hebrew people to have been all of the nations of Abarnahara. The temple was set up in the Palestinian hill country but was meant to be for the whole satrapy. The plan never had the time to take hold before Alexander conquered the Persians—less than a century. The religion had caught hold, especially in the temple state which it financed, but it never had time to unite the various people of Abarnahara into an *ethnos*. The Jewish priesthood were left in charge of an immensely valuable asset, the temple and therefore the religion, and the wider *ethnos* of the Hebrews was identified with the Jews of Yehud. Paradoxically, all of those who worshipped Yehouah were now Jews (Yehudim) whether they had ever been associated with Yehud or not. Many had not. So, already at the start of the Hellenistic era, Jews were widespread in Abarnahara and even beyond.

The Persians had encouraged all of those Canaanites and Babylonians who were devoted to Ea, Yah, and Yehu to accept the primacy of the temple state, and had provided a history which explained why they should—the diaspora of Samaria—and why their religion had needed restoration—it had become corrupted through being separated from its cult centre. Thus worshippers of Yehouah everywhere were persuaded they had been led in apostasy and adopted the Persian line that they should join the “remnant” who had remained pure. In Babylonia and even in Iran, many people worshipped Ea and thus became Jews. Even at its outset, Judaism had a diaspora! Before long Phoenician Jews carried the religion into Carthage in north Africa and to large merchant cities in the Mediterranean like Rome.

Judaism was a worldwide phenomenon in a remarkably short time, but it was the Egyptian Ptolemies who stimulated the extension of the scriptures from the relatively short and simple legends left by the Persians when they offered to translate them into Greek to add them to the Alexandrine Library in the third century BC. Much of it was freshly written or extended by redactors working to a Ptolemaic, pro-Greek, anti-Seleucid Babylonian

agenda, claiming that the Greek archives allowed them to vastly expand the sketchy notion of Moses, the Jews at first had.

In the second century BC, the Maccabees re-nationalised what had been intended as a universal religion by the Persians. They claimed, as usual, to be puritans trying to keep the religion free of the Hellenization that was supposed to have been forced on them. Needless to say, they were not, but continued the Hellenization, though the nationalization of the cult must have dismayed the more catholic Jews now spread out over the world and thoroughly Hellenized out of necessity. Their dismay became the basis of a newly universalistic Judaism. It was Christianity.

The justification of religious reform is often presented as the need to get back to a more original purer religion. The Persians pretended that their own utterly new set of laws called "The Law", or now *Deuteronomy*, had been found and implemented by Josiah 200 years before. It was not true, but was written up in the propaganda history that they were preparing to give the new colony an identity. The Persian colonists were restoring the reforms that Josiah had already introduced but the apostates who had remained in the land, the Am ha Eretz, had undermined. Could any faithful worshipper of Yehouah contradict this?

Certain epigraphic changes dated to the time of Josiah are taken as evidence of the reality of Josiah's reforms such as the preference for "yhw" in the south instead of the northern form "yw". Unfortunately, the dating of everything in the Palestinian hills has been botched by the Albright school who refused to accept that anything happened after the exile. They dated everything as pre-exilic, leaving huge gaps in the strata and epigraphy after the supposed "Return". Many inscriptions like these therefore have to be dated afresh and many will be found to be post-exilic, in the Persian period, when they were thought to have been pre-exilic and attributed to people like Josiah. So, the form "yhw" might be evidence of Persian not earlier Jewish reform.

Anyone who believes the biblical history must wince at Yehouah's awful injustice to Josiah. He followed instructions to reform the apostate religion, did it successfully, then God sent the Jews into captivity anyway because it apparently was not enough to make up for the apostasy of Manasseh.

Significant archaeological changes usually accompany a conquest or major regime change, they rarely occur with no strong cultural reason accompanying them. While, it is not impossible that Josiah effected a significant reform, it looks unlikely with the record of deviant rulers in both Israel and Judah, and when a clear reason for archaeological changes immediately follows when the Persians send colonists to take over. Indeed, the archaeological boundary that ought to be obvious is when the "Returners" return! Even in the biblical scheme of things that ought to be the obvious archaeological break point.

In any case, Josiah never succeeded in centralising the cult in Jerusalem, though it was supposed to have been an important aim, yet that is precisely what the Persians did, albeit not in the times of Cyrus and Darius I as the tendentious biblical history makes out, but in the time of Darius II, who in fact is the biblical Darius, not Darius the Great. An ostrakon found at Arad refers to a local "temple of Yehouah". Curiously, an honest and iconoclastic investigator, like Garbini, who willingly accepts that the crux of Jewish history was the "Return", can sneer at those ("though of course there are not many of them") who argue that only the Persian institution of Judaism makes historical sense out of the confusion caused by the spurious history in the bible.

## Syncretism and Temple States

Massoume Price in *The Iranian* confirms that Zoroastrianism made a place for certain foreign gods as helpers of Ahuramazda. The ruling principle was the advancement of reliable communities and the punishment of disloyal ones. Persian kings were ruthless with rebellions including ones by the Persian satraps and members of the royal household. Groups which rebelled were punished irrespective of race or religion. The Jews were usually loyal and so were prosperous.

Other temple communities were set up besides the Jewish one—Cyprus, Cilicia, Lycia and other places in Asia Minor had their own temple states. Even such remote tribes as the Arabs, Colchians, Ethiopians and Sakai had. The Achaemenian administration allowed them all to keep their religions with apparently little interference but had a chancellery minister of religions, and it is inconceivable that he did not aim to regularize worship to suit imperial policy.

Persians occupied the highest positions in each temple state, giving them control of the cultural, legal and administrative traditions of the conquered nations. Nominally, these ethnic and religious minorities followed their own legal code in personal matters such as marriage and family law. The conquered people were given land allotments in exchange for taxes and military service. Among these settlers were all groups such as Babylonians, Aramaeans, Jews, Indians and Sakai. In Susa itself, besides the local population and the Persians, there were large numbers of Babylonians, Egyptians, Jews and Greeks.

After the conquest of the Achaemenian empire by Alexander, the Seleucid Greeks and Parthians followed the same policies. All the main cities had Persian, Aramaean, Babylonian, Greek, Christian and Jewish temples. The Jewish chronicles mention the Parthian period as one of the best in their history. Jews enjoyed a long period of peace and had close contacts with the government. Centers of Jewish life in the Parthian empire were in Mesopotamia at Nisibis and Nehardea. A representative called the “exilarch” represented the Jewish minority at court and also carried out functions of a political-administrative nature. Jews took an active part in organizing the silk trade, supported by the kings and started a community in China.

Philo and Flavius Josephus documented the earlier relations between Jews and Parthians. The Jews took part in the rebellions against Trajan in Mesopotamia (116 AD), adding to their unpopularity in the Roman world after the Jewish War of 66-70 AD, and shortly, in 132-135 AD, they were to rebel under Bar Kosiba and finish up evicted from Judaea, taking many Jewish refugees into the Parthian empire.

In the reign of the Sassanid dynasty from 205 AD until the conquest of the Muslims in 651 AD, oppression of rival religions to Zoroastrianism began. Kidir, the chief Mobad (priest) under King Bahram II (276-293 AD), promoted Zoroastrianism in the empire and persecuted other religions. He declared:

The false doctrines of Ahriman and of the idols suffered great blows and lost credibility. The Jews (Yahud), Buddhists (Shaman), Hindus (Brahman), Nazarenes (Nasara), Christians (Kristiyan), Baptists (Makdag) and Manichaeans (Zandik) were smashed in the empire, their idols destroyed, and the habitations of the idols annihilated and turned into abodes and seats of the gods.

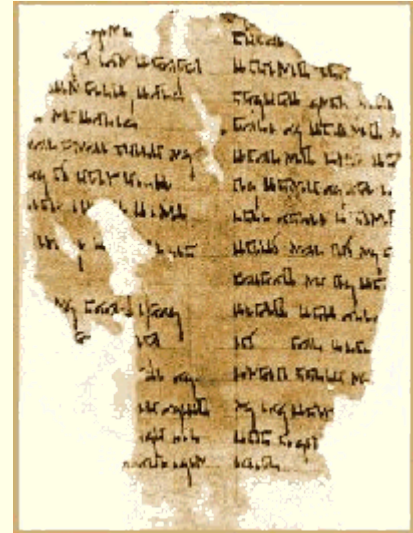
All of these were religions that had been regarded as Juddin, acceptable, in earlier times, and had syncretized

enormously with Zoroastrianism. The Sassanids had forgotten or abandoned the earlier policy of syncretism in the fear that the children were overwhelming the parent.

## Persia and the Essenes

Zoroastrian parallels with the Qumran documents are huge. The *Damascus Document* condemns those who enter the New Covenant but then leave to join the *Liar*. The *Habakkuk Commentary* enlarges on the theme of the *Liar*, telling of trouble within the community when the *Liar* secedes from the order and comes into conflict with the *Teacher of Righteousness*. In 2 *Corinthians* 11:31, Paul is insistent that he “does not lie” apparently answering an unpleasant criticism of him. The choice of language in these instances stems from Zoroaster.

The Qumran Community was an apocalyptic sect. They were expecting the end of the world just like Zoroaster. The Jewish messianic ideal of a Deliverer came from Persia. The Enoch Literature is Persian of about the fourth century BC. Apocalypticism seems to owe everything to Persia and the flavour of Persian religion on Judaism stems largely from the apocalyptic writers. The Qumran library proves that Apocalypticism was a considerable movement in Judaism not merely a fringe interest. Christian theologians used to believe that the anticipation of God’s kingdom to come was uniquely Jesus’s message. Now we see it was hundreds of years old, had come out of Persia with Cyrus’s “returners” and had been perpetuated by the Essenes.



Habakkuk Scroll from the caves at Qumran

A dualistic doctrine was almost unknown to the Jews. Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin notes, in the [Encyclopaedia Iranica](#), that the doctrine of two spirits was only sporadically attested in Jewish literature, though the spirits under God’s command were not always good and benevolent. God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem, and Saul was troubled by an “evil spirit” after the “spirit of God” departed from him.

The Qumran documents speak of Good and Evil, Light and Dark, the Way of Darkness and the Way of Light, the Spirit of Darkness and the Spirit of Light, The Children of Darkness and the Children of Light, Truth is Light, Falsehood is Darkness. The Teacher of Righteousness is opposed by Belial, the Demon of Evil. The Way of Good leads to salvation, the Way of Evil leads to torment. Of the four gospels, *John* reflects this terminology most accurately showing its Essene links.

The *Manual of Discipline* (or *Community Rule*) found among the Qumran documents includes a treatise on the two spirits as propounded by the Qumran sect, founded in the mid-second century BC.

God created all things, then:

He created man to have dominion over the world and made for him two spirits, that he might walk by

them until the appointed time of his visitation. They are the spirits of truth and error. In the abode of light are the origins of truth, and from the source of darkness are the origins of error. In the hand of the prince of lights is dominion over all sons of righteousness. In the ways of light they walk. And in the hand of the angel of darkness is all dominion over the sons of error. And in the ways of darkness they walk. And by the angel of darkness is the straying of all the sons of righteousness, and all their sin and their iniquities and their guilt, and the transgressions of their works in his dominion... But God in the mysteries of his understanding and in his glorious wisdom has ordained a period for the rule of error, and in the appointed time of punishment he will destroy it forever. And then shall come out forever the truth of the world.

These words are reminiscent of the Zoroastrian doctrine of the two spirits, as embodied in the ethical and eschatological dualism of the Gathas. The Jewish document differs from Iranian doctrine on one important point: specifying predestination, rather than the free choice of Zoroastrian theology. The essential Gathic emphasis on the role of the two spirits in the drama of choice was so alien to the Jewish milieu that it could be accommodated only through conception of the third spirit.

In apocryphal, Christian, and rabbinical literature the good and the evil spirits are also opposed to each other. In the apocryphal *Gospel of Judas* (second century AD) the spirits of truth and error that serve men are mentioned, as well as a third spirit personifying the ability to choose: "and in the midst is the Spirit of intelligence, who is able to turn wherever he chooses." In most texts, only good and evil spirits are named, as in John's gospel. In the Gnostic treatise, *Hermas*, the holy spirit and the evil spirit dwell together in man.

The opposition between predestination and free choice, the identification of the spirits with light and darkness, and the claim that the two spirits were created by God are all features of the Zurvanite myth of a god of time or destiny, father of Ohrmazd (light) and Ahriman (dark). As this kind of theology prevailed in Iranian religions in the period of the New Covenant Jewish community at Damascus (first century BC), it is more likely than the ancient Gathic theology to have been known to the Qumran sect.

This conclusion is borne out by Flavius Josephus's report:

The sect of the Essenes holds that Destiny is master of all things and that nothing happens to men but what has been decreed by it.

In the Dead Sea scrolls several references to casting lots provide further corroborative evidence:

According to each man's inheritance in truth he does right, and so he hates error, but according to his possession in the lot of error he does wickedly in it, and so he abhors truth.

Thou has cast for man an eternal lot.

Ohrmazd is said to be all-knowing, Ahriman ignorant (meaning that Ormazd had foresight, but Ahriman did not) and, in the scrolls, God is "El de'oth," "the God of knowledge." In the creation myth recorded by the Armenian Eznik, in the fifth century, Zurvan says to Ahriman "I have made Ohrmazd reign above thee," which seems to have been interpreted as meaning that Ohrmazd reigned in the spirit, but Ahriman in this world. This belief,



perhaps transmitted via Essenism, meant this world was evil, as the Gnostics believed, a Vale of Woe to be endured as a test of worth, but ultimately to be destroyed.

At Qumran the present age is dominated by the evil spirit:

So shall they do year by year all the days of the dominion of Belial... And [the world] has wallowed in the ways of wickedness in the dominion of error until the appointed time of judgment which has been decreed.

The Scrolls, in hymn 17, also have an allusion to physical resurrection, a Zoroastrian doctrine:

For the sake of Thy glory Thou hast purified man of sin... that... he may partake of the lot of Thy Holy Ones; bodies gnawed by worms may be raised from the dust to the counsel [of Thy truth]... that he may stand before Thee with the everlasting host.

Philo is thought to have been close to the Essenes and their brothers and sisters, the Therapeutae. Yet, Philo's religious allegories are considered to have been influenced by the *Gathas*, with which they have significant similarities. The six Dunameis of Philo, sort of angelic rays of god linking him with the world, are the Amesha Spentas. They fill the world with God's presence and keep it in harmony. He calls them the six Cities of Refuge, which links the concept with the romance of Joseph and Aseneth, Aseneth being interpreted as meaning "City of Refuge" after her return from apostasy to the Jewish god.

Philo was influenced by Persia just as the Essenes were, though western scholars in their usual arrogance have tried to make out that the Persians were influenced by Philo! Mills was more honest:

Philo drank in his Iranian lore from pages of his exilic Bible, or from the Bible books which were as yet detached, and which not only recorded Iranian edicts from Persian kings, but which themselves were half made up of Jewish-Persian history. (MIL-ZPAI)

When God says: "Let us make man," (*Gen 1:26*) Philo rationalizes the "us" as God addressing his Dunameis. Philo made the creative instrument of god, the Logos, as an aspect of the Father, but there were other Logoi who had roles akin to those of the Amesha Spentas. Plato had the same idea, god leaving the creation to a craftsman, the Demiurgos. There is not the least reason why these ideas should not have derived from Persian religion.

The Essenes used a solar calendar of twelve months of 30 days. The Persians used a similar calendar, the difference only being that the remaining five days were all collected together in the manner of the Egyptians rather than the Essenes. The year started at different dates for different purposes, just as the Jews had a religious year and a commercial year starting at different times in the year. The Persian reformed calendar is thought to have been introduced in 441 BC (or 481 BC). So, Ezra or Nehemiah could have brought it as part of their reforms to Yehud.

The Persians considered leprosy a severe punishment for falsehood, for "lying against the sun"—breaking a promise. The Essenes might have used the same terminology, regarding the Jerusalem priesthood as breaking their promises given to God, and therefore being called lepers.

## Christianity as a Mithraic Cult

Christianity adopted these doctrines from the pro-Persian factions—baptism, communion (the haoma ceremony), guardian angels, the heavenly journey of the soul, worship on Sunday, the celebration of Mithras' birthday on December 25th, celibate priests that mediate between man and God, the Trinity, Zvarnah—the idea that emanations from the sun are collected in the head and radiate in the form of nimbus and rays, and asha-arta, “the true prayer”. Centuries later in Greece this became Logos or “true sentence” and like in Persia it was associated with fire.

Mithraism is widely considered to be a syncretistic religion, that is, a combination of Persian, Babylonian and Greek influences. However, the Greek influence seems to be limited to the identification in Greece of Mithras with the Greek god Perseus. The Babylonian influence is said to have been astrology, but the Persians were also interested in astrology. Zoroastrians worshipped at altars on hills and had a whole class of professional Magi or priests who had lots of time on their hands to do astrological research.

Rather than a syncretistic religion, it would be more proper to call Mithraism a Zoroastrian subcult or heresy. The center of the Mithraic cult was in Tarsus in Cilicia, Southeast Turkey. This is whence Paul, the founder of the Christian church, came as a young man. By one of the perpetual coincidences of Christianity, the popular festival of the Mysteries of Mithras were celebrated at the spring equinox.

The *New Testament* was written, 300 years before the Persian empire had scuttled from Alexander, yet it is remarkably Persian in some of its crucial terms.

- ❑ “King of Kings” and “Lord of Lords” were Persian titles for their Shahanshah—literally, King of Kings
- ❑ Paul insisted that the women of Corinth should wear a veil in church, but he called it an “exousia” or an “authority.” This was the name of the veil worn by Persian women to show they were under the authority of their father or husband.
- ❑ The agent of the Persian king was the “man sent” by him—his “apostle!” Only the man sent directly from the court of the Shah at Susa could override the authority of the satrap. In this sense Ezra was certainly an apostle.
- ❑ John's gospel calls an official, referred to as a centurion in *Luke* and a Chiliarch (colonel) in *Matthew*, a Basilikos, or a “Royal,” a Persian rank.

Paul's insight on the road to Damascus was that instead of treating Jesus as a false saviour, he could be identified as the true saviour if combined with the new idea of “the second coming”. That would cure the embarrassing fact that nothing had come of Jesus's time on earth. The rest was simple, Paul identified Jesus with Mithras and taught a modified Mithraism. That got Paul branded as a heretic by the true church and James the brother of Jesus. Mithraic ideas were so generally attractive that they eventually won out.

In 2 *Corinthians* 11:12-15, Paul criticizes the archapostles as disguising themselves as “Servants of Righteousness” and uses the sentence “Satan disguises himself as an Angel of Light” both betraying Qumran and therefore Persian influence and apparently deliberately used against the upholders of the Community tradition.

If Ahuramazda originally created two spirits, rather than simply being one of them created by Zurvan, he is responsible for evil in the world. He cannot be a purely good god, though the later development of the religion identified Ahuramazda with the Good Spirit. Christians like to think that their Father god, in heaven is purely good too, but they do not read their bibles. Amos asks:

Shall evil befall a city and Yehouah hath not done it?

The author of *1 Kings* says it is Yehouah's will to send a lying spirit into the mouths of 400 prophets.

Christians like to say that Zoroastrianism is dualist unlike their own monotheism, yet there is not the least difference in practice between them, and to invent doctrinal differences is pure sophistry. Judaism and Christianity postulate a good god opposed by an evil god but ultimately the good will triumph. All forms of Zoroastrianism are the same. However the good and evil came about is irrelevant. The fact that good will triumph is the encouragement to people to *be* good and finish up on the winning side, otherwise the three systems are entirely dualist in practice and everyone, as Zoroaster says, has an equal choice between choosing good or choosing evil.

Zoroaster accepted fire as the symbol of the divine, as the ultimate purifying agent. Jews and Christians can have no objection to this symbolism. *Deuteronomy* declares:

For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

*Dt 4:24; 9:3*

And to remind Christians *Hebrews* repeats it:

For our God is a consuming fire.

*Heb 12:29*

Moreover, if Mithras, seen as the Holy spirit and also the sun, took on the attributes of Ahuramazda as a god beyond the sun, then the Jews must accept that at the time of Ezekiel and later still, if the Essenes are to be considered, themselves worshipped the sun:

He brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east.

*Ezek 8:16*

Christians have no need to feel superior because their most famous apostle essentially did the same:

Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour.

*Acts 10:9*

The time given is noon, so Peter is praying at the highest station of the sun, a meaningful time for him to pray

as it was to the Essenes, but otherwise an add place and time to pray. And it was so hot it gave him hallucinations. Elsewhere (Acts 3:1), the “hour of prayer” is the ninth hour. It seems likely that the Essenes marked each of the stations of the sun with hymns and prayers.

When, in his letters, Paul speaks of the third heaven:

I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven,

*2 Cor 12:2*

he is suggesting that there were different levels to the cosmos below the highest heaven. The Persians thought that there were seven levels or zones to the world, the seventh being the highest, whence our expression that bliss is being in seventh heaven.

If Christianity was revealed, it is time Christians found out properly when it was and who by.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 2. How Persia Created Judaism**  
**Angels: Winged Beings from**

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### **Angels and Monotheism**

The word “angel” is the Greek “angelos” meaning a messenger—someone who brings messages from God. The Hebrew is “malak.” The Greeks had Iris, in Homer, who brought messages from Olympus to humanity. The Greeks also had Hermes or Mercury who also was a messenger, the Herald of God. Do Christians accept these as angels? And they had their own name for the lesser spirits that acted as messengers for the gods—daimones. To accept angels is immediately to become polytheistic—an angel is a lesser god! Catholics will deny that angels and demons are gods at all, and presumably that Satan is also not a god, which is all puzzling to we mortals deprived of patriarchal religion. A god is a notional being with divine, that is to say superhuman or supernatural, powers. If angels are not gods why can they do supernatural things? If Satan is not a god like Yehouah, why is he such a trouble to God himself? If God is all powerful, why does he need angels to bring messages to earth on his behalf? If we are to believe all this then God is not all powerful, the Devil is just as powerful and both have armies of lesser gods to fight their cosmic battles and bring messages to earth while they are busy elsewhere.

Despite this morass of contradictions, Christians will claim to be monotheistic and still believe in angels. The angels they believe in appear to men at God’s behest wearing a pair of large feathered wings on their shoulders and flowing robes. What is so odd about heaven that angels need wings? Or do they only attach their wings to fly down to earth? If God can make men walk on water why should angels *need* wings? Why do they *need* flowing robes? Is it cold in heaven? Or are angels prudish? Do Christians ever ask these questions? Angels are always depicted as men but looking effeminate. They were traditionally depicted as androgynous, sexually ambiguous looking youths (as are the earliest pictures of Jesus). Perhaps this is because Jesus had explained to the Sadducees in *Mark* 12:25 that angels were sexless beings. He said when the Righteous Ones rose from the dead, they “neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels which are in heaven.” On rising, the Righteous lived for ever just like the angels. Marriage only has purpose for sexual procreation, and immortal creatures do not need to reproduce—which makes it odd that he should call God, Father.

God Himself is plainly masculine in all His attributes, yet all his servants and hosts are androgynes. It is a lonely business running a cosmos without a wife. The ancient Israelites, of course, were not so unkind as to leave their god without a wife. She was called His Asherah. But modern Jews and Christians are so patriarchal that they will not let Yehouah have a sexual companion. He only has all those sexless angels. They are not great thinkers angels. They only do as they are told. Perhaps they are robots.

### **Did Angels Evolve?**

Christians, particularly fundamentalists, are sure that Christianity was fully revealed by God and owes nothing to history or evolution. The wings of the angels therefore are singularly Christian things. They have feathers like birds, but fairies have insects’ wings. One supposes the angels are therefore from a higher evolutionary level,

but fundamentalists do not believe in evolution! Well, fairies do not exist but angels do, as Yehouah's exclusive hosts. Why then were Assyrians and Persians in the first millennium BC depicting non-avian creatures with feathered wings just like those of the angels? The Assyrians had angelic bulls and angelic lions that they called "lamassu." Like angels, they were protective spirits. The Greeks too had an angelic horse called Pegasus, and they always depicted the Goddess Victory as an angel.

A tomb in Volumni, near Perugia, has two figures kneeling in prayer for the dead person in the coffin. They have long flowing robes and large birds' wings growing from their shoulders. Were they angels? The tomb is dated in the second century BC! On a Pagan fresco, also pre-Christian an angelic looking figure with wings and robes is whipping an initiate. Is this an angel?

Some Christians think they have an angelic double called a guardian angel, and they even have festival for them—the Festival of Guardian Angels was fixed on 2 October by the church in 1621 AD. Peter's guardian angel is even mentioned in the gospels. The Egyptians had a similar belief called the "ka" and the Persians had their "fravashis," heavenly doubles. Do we really have heavenly doubles, and if so why did God reveal them to the Egyptians and the Persians long before He revealed them to Christians? In the work of Hermas, in the second century AD, the fravashi of Zoroaster appears in the dual form of a good angel and a wicked angel. It was for each human to decide which angel to believe.

The point is that the Christian concept of an angel is much older than Christianity despite the averments of some empty headed Christians. The Zoroastrians had angels that were of the Christian type—winged figures—and their priests, to judge by pictures of them, wore an angelic outfit, unless this was an artistic convention, akin to the Christian halo, signifying holiness. The figure hovering above royal inscriptions is either meant to be Ahuramazda, or some think it was his fravashi, or heavenly double (even God had one!—everything had), Ahuramazda not revealing himself directly, just like the Jewish concept of God after the Persian conquest.

That the Persian supreme god, Ahuramazda, had his own fravashi, is an idea that Christians will doubtless chuckle over, until they recollect that the Jewish religion was no different because Yehouah appears in *Exodus* (Ex 3:2-4) as the Angel of Yehouah, not as himself. Of course, this is lost in modern translations intended to fool the faithful because Angel of Yehouah (malak Yehouah) is translated as Angel of the Lord, Yehouah is translated as the Lord, and elohim is translated as God. The angel is plainly God because both are mentioned separately as being in the burning bush, so there is no mistake in the scriptures that the Jewish God had an angel, as Ahuramazda had. Human beings could not look on the face of Yehouah, but could have a chat with His fravashi, with no sweat. In *Isaiah* 63:9, the fravashi of Yehouah is described as the "angel of His presence".

## **The Origin of Good and Evil**

Yehouah was not the first god to reveal secrets to His prophets. Zoroaster gives his convictions as revelation by the god, Ahuramazda, the Holiest, the Far-Seeing and the All-Knowing. For a revelation of Ahuramazda to have been meaningful to the Iranians, Ahuramazda must have already been a notable god. Zoroaster also speaks of the two spirits of the first beginning as if they two were familiar to his audience.

The Iranians seemed at first to have had a pantheon of celestial gods of light and darkness, creation and



destruction, among them being Varuna (Uranus), a sky god, but perhaps conceived of as a god of space, and Mitra (Mithras), a sun god, and Zurvan (Cronos), a god of time, who is possibly Vishnu, in Indian religion, in his destructive aspect, or the goddess, Kali, Time. S G F Brandon says that Zurvan, the Persian god of Time can be traced back to 1200 BC. The Indians identify time with decay and destruction, but see both as necessary and therefore no less godly than creation.

One idea was that Zervan created the Good and the Bad, a later belief of some Zoroastrians but a heresy for others. Eudemus of Rhodes, a follower of Aristotle, before 300 BC wrote:

The Magi and the whole Aryan race call by the name Space or Time that which forms an intelligible and integrated whole from which a Good God and an Evil Demon were separated out, or as some say, light and darkness before these.

Thus undifferentiated nature condensed into two elements, one led by Ormuzd and one by Ahriman, as they came to be called. It seems that Space-Time was deified in fourth century Persia. Zurvan creates light and dark, life and death, and other ambivalent qualities.

Ahuramazda seems to be identifiable with Varuna of the Vedas, the Lord of Heaven and the guardian of Rita (Arta, Asha), often translated as Truth but also having the connotation of law and order in the nature of things—like the impersonal god of the early Greek philosophers and the Stoics. Zoroaster might have rejected Zurvan and made Varuna as Ahuramazda the primal creator, or seen Varuna as merging with Zurvan as the god of Space and Time, creating at the beginning and destroying at the end of time.

The trouble is that the Holiest had then to have created Evil as well as Good. Zoroaster seemed not to be too bothered with the cosmic details because he seemed to be interested in morals not cosmology. For him, what was important was that people had to choose between the two opposite principles. So Ahuramazda is shown by Zoroaster as creating Right as author of the Good, and creating the Lie as author of the Bad, balanced such that each Good creation was balanced by an Evil creation. The daughter of Right is the “Goddess,” Piety.

## **A Good Spirit and an Evil Spirit**

Mithras does not appear explicitly in the Gathas but later was considered the guardian of honour and contracts, implying a guardian of Truth. Zoroaster had designated seven spirits of Mazda and Mithras was either an alternative name of one of the spirits or was later associated with the particular spirit of Mazda. Spenta Mainyu was the Good or Holy Spirit. Spenta Mainyu seems to be the Right, the Truth, the Order behind the “massy heavens” that “clothe” the Holiest Spirit, an alternative name for Ahuramazda. The later depictions of Mithras killing the Cosmic Bull has much astrological symbolism that implies he is seen as the Order behind existence—a transcendental god.

In Mithraism, Mithras was the Good Spirit but the Evil Spirit was a lion headed winged being entwined by a serpent. This seems to have meant Time as the destroyer, identified with Ahriman, the Prince of Darkness, whom the Gnostics saw as Lord of this world, the God of the Hebrews, the Set of the Egyptians. The Christian God was therefore Satan, according to the Gnostics, and the history of Christianity can only be considered to prove it.

The wicked spirit, Satan, first appeared in Egypt about 2,500 BC as Set the evil brother of Osiris. As the god of evil he was equated with Apophis, the celestial dragon that consumed the sun each night. Perhaps for this reason, he came to be seen as the equivalent of the Greek dragon, Typhon. Since Atum-Ra was the sun as creator, the Evil One was in constant warfare with the principle of Good. As the murderer of Osiris, Set was also associated with death.

The Babylonians had millions of fearful demons, but no single Evil One. The king of the Underworld, Nergal, was not seen as Evil, but merely the king of the dead, and that was scary enough without supposing he had evil intentions towards humanity. The human race were the servants of the gods, and would be rewarded by them through prosperity, if they served them well. Whether anyone served well or badly, the outcome was the same—death and the rule of king Nergal.

In Judaism, Satan, the Evil Spirit, appears as a “fallen angel,” but Isaiah admits that Yehouah created both good and evil, so the concept is the same as Zoroaster’s. In *1 Samuel* 19:9-10, Yehouah sends an evil spirit to possess Saul and make him try to impale David against a wall with his spear! In *Job*, Satan is a tormentor of human beings and has the role with the consent of Yehouah.

## **The Bene Ha-Elohim**

Did the Israelites have a concept of angels before the Persian period? It seems most likely that, just as every important element in the Jewish religion came from the Zoroastrianism practiced by the Achaemenid kings, the angels did too. The scriptural references common in *Genesis* to the “sons of the gods” (beni ha-elohim), always translated as “Sons of God,” so as not to spoil the perpetual monotheism of the scriptures, are often taken to mean angels, but this is harmonization. The sons of the gods look upon the daughter of men, lusted after them, copulated with them and bred a race of mighty ones or “Nephilim.” It sounds like a variant of the Greek myth of the Titans. In later tradition, to judge from Jesus speaking in Mark’s gospel (Mk 12:18-27), the angels were considered to be sexless because they had no need of reproduction, being immortal, so they cannot have been the lustful bene ha-Elohim.

In *Job* 1:6, Satan is one of the sons of the gods.

Now there was a day when the sons of Elohim came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. (*Job* 1:6)

The apparent classification of Satan as a son of the gods in this passage is used by clerics to suggest that the ancient Israelites called their angels bene ha-Elohim. In the sense that Zoroaster classed the minor Indo-European gods as angels or demons, it might be true that the sons of the gods did become identified with angels, but plainly that was a later development. The bene ha-Elohim were a rank of gods below the Elohim themselves and evidently Yehouah was included among their number, as the *fravashi* of the Israelite nation, besides Satan. The head of the Elohim was evidently El, but Yehouah displaced him and was elevated to the top god of the Israelites some time before about 450 BC.

Later Judaism, desiring a perfectly good Yehouah, depicted the fallen angels as rebelling against Him, just as

the wickedness of humans also had to be depicted as a rebellion against God. It fails to answer the problem because God is omniscient—He already knew when he created the angels that fell and sinful humanity, that they *would* fall. Creating something that He knew would finish up being evil, means that He was wilfully creating evil. He knew how it would turn out, but he still made it! The developers of Jewish mythology saw the equality of the fall of angels and the fall on humanity and decided that the fall of the angels, like the fall of man, must have been because they had consorted with wicked women! So a woman was the cause of Adam's fall and women were the cause of the fall of the angels. This is patriarchy at work.

## **Seraphim and Cherubim**

The real angels, as represented in Persian and Assyrian iconography appear in *Isaiah* 6:1ff, as the six winged seraphim that surround the throne of Yehouah. They were described as speaking and having hands and feet, so were of human form, apart from the six wings. Curiously, "seraph" is the name of the bronze serpent that Moses gave to the Israelites (Num 21:6) to worship, and that they did worship, according to the scriptures, until Hezekiah (716-687 BC) suppressed it allegedly as an apostasy from Yehouah. In reality this was the imposition of the God of Heaven over the former snake god of the Israelites.

Another type of angel evidently were the "cherubim" upon whom Yehouah rode as if on "the wings of the wind" (Psalms 18:10). Ezekiel also saw winged figures supporting Yehouah's throne. These were descriptions of the "lamassu," the winged bulls, griffins and lions commonly seen in Assyrian art. The Greeks called them sphinxes. Sphinxes were popular as decorations for the arms of Ancient Near Eastern thrones. *Exodus* 25:18-20 describes similar figures as decorating the Ark of the Covenant.

## **Michael and Mithras**

Rabbinic tradition confirms that the names of the archangels were brought from Babylon. What the Rabbis will not admit is that the Jewish religion altogether was brought from Babylon. The immediate lieutenants of Yehouah were the seven archangels, just as Ahuramazda had seven Amesha Spentas, or sons of the Holy One (God). The concept of angels as messengers of God was theologically necessary because high gods were perceived as too remote in their transcendence, so lesser gods, that walked on the earth occasionally, were needed to attract the attention of the Almighty. In Zoroastrianism, the seven primary angels were aspects of God himself, but they were increasingly personified and revered in their own right. One of them (Truth) apparently became identified with a pre-existent god, Mithras, and became another derivative religion.

A parallel development happened from Judaism, the archangel Michael being worshipped by Christians as Jesus, Yehouah's anointed Saviour. Jesus was undoubtedly an Essene and Essenes were preparing for the introduction of Heaven on earth by trying to be perfectly holy. They expected, if successful, to be resurrected as angels, and so eschewed sex and lived a life of chastity—practising to be angels! For this reason too they identified the Messiah with the leader of the Heavenly Host, the archangel Michael, whose arrival would sweep evil to destruction. The first Christians believed Jesus would *be* the archangel Michael on his return.

The original role of Michael and the identity of Jesus with him is clearly shown in *Revelation*. "War arose in heaven" and Michael and the hosts of angels fought against the dragon and his hosts—a legend taken from the Babylonian myth of Marduk's fight with the ancient Earth Mother, Tiamat, denigrated into a dragon. This is the

cosmic war of the *War Scroll*. In *Revelation* and in the *War Scroll*, *It is Michael who leads the forces of Good, but in Christian tradition it became Jesus who "returned" to win the cosmic war at his parousia.* In the Christian scheme, Michael fell from being an archangel to being the saint given authority over high places as the saintly equivalent of the sun god, just as Mithras had been a sun god too. Saint Michael has mounts, hills and chapels on hills that were once sanctified to sun worshipping. September 29th, Michaelmas, is his day.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 2. How Persia Created Judaism**  
**Herodotus on Persian: Persian Influences II**

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The Persians have no images of gods, no temples nor altars, and consider them a sign of folly. This comes from their not believing in gods to have the same nature with men, as the Greeks imagine.

They ascend the summits of the loftiest mountains, and there offer sacrifice to Zeus, the name they give to the whole circuit of the firmament. They likewise offer to the sun, to the moon, to fire, and to the winds. These are the only gods whose worship has come down to them from ancient times. Later they began the worship of Aphrodite, which they borrowed from the Arabians and Assyrians. Mylitta is the name by which the Assyrians know this goddess, which the Arabians call Alitta, and the Persians Mitra.

The Persians offer sacrifice to these gods not by raising an altar, lighting a fire, pouring libations, there is no sound of the flute, no putting on the chaplets, no consecrated barley-cake. Whoever wishes to sacrifice brings a victim to a spot of ground which is pure from pollution, and there calls upon the name of the god to be offered the sacrifice. They encircle their turban with a myrtle wreath.

The sacrificer is not allowed to pray for blessings on himself alone, but he prays for the welfare of the king, and of the whole Persian people, among whom he is of necessity included. He cuts the victim into pieces, and having boiled the flesh, lays it out upon the softest grass that he can find, trefoil especially. It is not lawful to offer sacrifice unless there is a Magus present. When all is ready, one of the Magi comes forward and chants a hymn, which recounts the origin of the gods. After waiting a short time the sacrificer carries the flesh of the victim away with him, and makes whatever use of it he pleases.

Of all the days of the year, the one which they celebrate most is their birthday. They have the board furnished on that day with an ampler supply than common. The richer Persians cause an ox, a horse, a camel, and an ass to be baked whole and so served up to them. The poorer classes use instead the smaller kinds of cattle.

They eat little solid food but abundance of dessert, which is set on table a few dishes at a time. They are very fond of wine, and drink it in large quantities. To vomit or obey natural calls in the presence of another is forbidden among them.

They deliberate upon affairs of weight when they are drunk, and then on the morrow, when they are sober, the decision to which they came the night before is put before them by the master of the house in which it was made. If it is then approved of, they can act on it. If not they set it aside. If they are sober at their first deliberation, they reconsider the matter under the influence of wine.

When they meet each other in the streets, persons of equal rank, instead of speaking, kiss each other on the lips. Where one is a little inferior to the other, the kiss is given on the cheek. Where the difference of rank is great, the inferior prostrates himself upon the ground.

Of nations, they honour most their nearest neighbours whom they esteem next to themselves. Those who live

beyond these they honour in the second degree, and so with the remainder, the further they are removed, the less the esteem in which they hold them. They look upon themselves as superior in all aspects to the rest of mankind, regarding others as approaching to excellence in proportion as they dwell nearer to them, whence it comes to pass that those who are the farthest off must be the most degraded of mankind.

Under the dominion of the Medes, the several nations of the empire exercised authority over each other in this order. The Medes were lords over all, and governed nations upon their borders, who in their turn governed the states beyond, who likewise bore rule over the nations which adjoined on them. And this is the order which the Persians also follow in their distribution of honour, for, like the Medes, they have a progressive scale of administration and government.

No nation so readily adopts foreign customs as the Persians. They have taken the dress of the Medes, considering it superior to their own, and in war they wear the Egyptian breastplate. As soon as they hear of any luxury, they instantly make it their own, and hence, among other novelties, they have learned pederasty from the Greeks. Each of them has several wives and a still larger number of concubines. Next to prowess in arms, the greatest proof of manly excellence is to be father of many sons. Every year the king sends rich gifts to the man who can show the largest number, for they hold that number is strength.

Their sons are carefully instructed from their fifth to their twentieth year, in three things alone—to ride, to draw the bow, and to speak the truth. Until their fifth year they are not allowed to come into the sight of their father, but pass their lives with the women. This is done that, if the child dies young, the father may not be afflicted by its loss.

It is a wise rule, as also is the following—that the king shall not put any one to death for a single fault, and that none of the Persians shall visit a single fault in a slave with any extreme penalty, but in every case the services of the offender shall be set against his misdoings, and, if the latter be found to outweigh the former, the aggrieved party shall then proceed to punishment.

The Persians maintain that never yet did any one kill his own father or mother. In cases where they do, they are sure that, at bottom, the child would be found to be either a changeling or the fruit of adultery, for it is not likely that the real father should perish by the hands of his child.

They hold it unlawful to talk of any thing which it is unlawful to do. The most disgraceful thing in the world is to tell a lie, and the next worse, to owe a debt, because among other reasons, the debtor is obliged to tell lies.

A Persian with leprosy is not allowed to enter a city, or to have any dealings with other Persians. He must, they say, have sinned against the sun. Foreigners attacked by this disorder, are forced to leave the country, even white pigeons are often driven away, as guilty of the same offense.

They never defile a river with the secretions of their bodies, nor even wash their hands in one, nor will they allow others to do so, as they have a great reverence for rivers.

There is another peculiarity, which the Persians themselves have never noticed. Their names, which are expressive of some bodily or mental excellence, all end with the same letter—the letter which is called San by



the Dorians, and Sigma by the Ionians. Any one who examines will find that the Persian names, one and all without exception, end with this letter.

Another custom is spoken of with reserve, and not openly, concerning their dead. The body of a male Persian is never buried, until it has been torn either by a dog or a bird or prey. The Magi have this custom beyond a doubt, for they practice it without any concealment. The dead bodies are covered with wax, and then buried in the ground.

The Magi are a very peculiar race, differing entirely from the Egyptian priests, and indeed from all other men whatsoever. The Egyptian priests make it a point of religion not to kill any live animals except those which they offer in sacrifice. The Magi, on the contrary, kill animals of all kinds with their own hands, excepting dogs and men. They seem to take a delight in the employment, and kill, as readily as they do other animals, ants and snakes, and such like flying or creeping things. Since this has always been their custom, let them keep to it.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 3. Ezra & The Law**  
**"Returning" Exiles or Persian Colonists?**

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### **Jews in Exile?**

The composition of lamentations by the Israelites by the Rivers of Babylon, and so on, gives the impression that the Israelites were again enslaved in Babylon, just as they had been in Egypt in the Exodus myth. They lived in concentration camps "under the malign eyes of their warders", as G Garbini puts it. If the colonists had come from the Rivers of Babylon, namely from the upper reaches of the Euphrates, in the Land of the Rivers, as the biblical clues suggest, then they had lived there as free people, and the lamentations originally must have been for the loss of their native homeland there in Syria, a bountiful place.

Certainly, too, the Jews who had been deported to wherever they went, in the policy of the time of transporting the elite class of troublesome people, will have been made rulers of some other troublesome people, and ordered to keep them in control or suffer the consequences. In short, they were transported as rulers wherever they were, and had the support of the state so long as they kept order. Since only the skilled and educated upper classes were deported, it seems incredible that, just when kings were beginning to realise the advantages of having empires organised to maximise revenue, they would banish skilled people into unproductive activities in concentration camps.

The Jewish royalty unquestionably were treated extremely well, accepted and financed at the court of the Babylonian kings where they could be observed, and had little incentive anyway to want to return to their dessicated little country. Biblicists, hardly consistent, as ever, also point to the success of the supposed Jewish banks of Egibi and Murushu. Wealthy bankers could hardly run their businesses as slaves in concentration camps. Nor would people like these want to return to the hardships of scratching a living from parched limestone outcroppings. Jews were supposed to have been in exile, at a time when a generation was practically about 15 years, for a minimum of three generations even if we are to believe the biblical myth that they returned immediately they had the chance. They would have long ceased to have entertained any such thoughts.

Ezra could not have expounded the law until around 420 BC, about 160 years after the exile, two long lifetimes or about ten generations. No exiled Jew could have been still entertaining any yearning for their home after this time. They will have spent the time as insecure but privileged rulers of some Babylonian province, their insecurity being a guarantee of their loyalty and their privilege rewarding them with wealth. They must have been better off where they were than in their dusty homeland, and they must have known that any hopes of a return, even if they first entertained them, as they might have, were out of the question.

Biblicists like to claim that the success of the Jews in exile is proved by the success of the Egibi bank, said by many to have been Jewish from the names of some its staff being theophoric in some abbreviated form of Yehouah, or otherwise supposedly looking Jewish. Thus the name of the bank, Egibi, is supposed to be the same as Jacob, and several of the names are said to have been in the lists of Ezra's "Returners". Even so, A Ungnad (1941), cited by Garbini (GG-HIAI), says most of the family names were Babylonian, not Jewish.

Even more curious is that the Egibi bank had flourished in Babylon even before Nebuchadrezzar had destroyed Jerusalem and exiled the Jewish ruling elite. The biblicalist excuse then becomes that these are not Jews but remnants of the lost tribes of Israelites. What is overlooked is the simple fact that the Israelites were not the only people who ever worshipped Yehouah. Canaanites, Syrians and even Babylonians worshipped the same god. In Babylon he was Ea, matching Egibi rather better than Jacob.

In the time they were in exile, the Jews must have fully integrated with the people they were set over. So, who did “return”? Using the biblical clues, they came from the watered plains of Syria by the mountains leading to Uratu, by the cities of Urfa and Harran. The word “Egibi”, if it were a hybrid, looks to mean something like the House of the Highlanders (E-Gibea) which again would imply the north of Mesopotamia where the plains of Syria meet the highlands of modern Turkey, only about 100 miles from Canaan, and not much further from places like Hamath known to have had names theophoric in Yehouah in contemporary times. This too is the place whence came the Persian colonists to Yehud.

Doubtless the colonists were actually a mixed bunch, but all had to believe and propagate the ethnic myth they had been provided with by their Persian masters. The myth was that they had been sent into exile long ago as God’s punishment, but having served their time, at the instigation of God’s anointed one, Cyrus, the king of kings, acting upon the wishes of their own God called Yehouah, they were being returned, and had now to keep the restored religion of Yehouah free of pollution by idolatry. To help them, Yehouah had provided them with a law, and the redeemer, the shananshah, had sent his chief minister to read it out for them. He was called Ezra, or some say, Zorobabel.

## **The Extent of God’s Wrath**

Cyrus was happy for co-operative people to restore their traditional beliefs, because the astonishingly rapid growth of the empire overtaxed its human resources. There were not enough experienced Persian administrators to administer such a huge territory. Persians were placed in senior positions throughout the empire but locals had to be trusted at lower levels, and in minor places. For an empire facing up to Egyptians, Greeks, Syrians and Indians, Palestine at first was simply an eroded hillside. The Persians made it important for defensive and treasury reasons.

The author of *Ezra* 1-6 wants to depict the return as a single huge event urged by Cyrus himself, though it was not. Nor was the building of the temple undertaken quickly but only a long time after Cyrus and even Darius the Great had died. Biblical commentaries will happily tell us that Josephus got confused among the Persian Dariuses, but the scholars are no more enlightened. P Ackroyd notes that the arrival of Zerubabel, Joshua and the large number of settlers has been placed by different biblical authorities in the time of Cyrus, Cambyses and Darius I. It shows that no one knows and they are all guessing—and they are all wrong! The compilers of the bible themselves had gotten confused. It is most likely that the date is the second year of Darius II, a hundred years later than Darius I.

It seems that the earliest colonists to come into the hill countries of Palestine under the Persians did not build a temple at all! Their excuse is given in the bible as that the time had not yet come. “The time has not yet come”, uses the word “et” for “time”, a word used elsewhere to mean a divinely appointed time. The inscriptions of

Esarhaddon testify to the king's use of a divine schedule for restoring the Babylonian temple to Marduk at Esagila destroyed by his father Sennacherib. Destruction was a sign of divine wrath, and the people had to be persuaded that the god was no longer angry. The Esarhaddon inscriptions state that the period of wrath was for seventy years but the god had reduced the sentence out of compassion to eleven years. The Assyrian king had really decided to reverse his father's policy because a grateful population were easier to govern than a resentful one.

The change was presented easily because the sexagesimal numeric system was a system of counting in units, 10s, 60s and 360s, rather as we count in units, 10s, 100s, and so on. Seventy years was one sixty and one ten (11) and eleven was one ten and one unit (11), so the adjustment from seventy to eleven looked divinely rational to a Babylonian. It is worth noting in passing that the 490 years which also pops up in prophecy is  $(360 + 60)(11)$  added to  $(60 + 10)(11)$ . The time, two times and half a time is  $3 \times 11$  ( $3 \times [360 + 60]$ ). The 210 years which turns up in Josephus is  $3 \times 11$  ( $3 \times [60 + 10]$ ). The years of David in Jerusalem is  $3 \times 11$  ( $3 \times [10 + 1]$ ). When the magic number of years of punishment had been completed, then the "years were fulfilled and the appointed time had arrived". Many examples of this usage are known in Mesopotamian tablets.

The sign of a God's change of heart was often a change of king, the reason being that of Esarhaddon himself—a new king often pursued a different policy. To do so, he presented the U-turn as a divine decision. The appointed time was fulfilled or the god repented of his wrath. The new king had been placed on the throne by the god to carry out his new commandments. The parallels with the bible do not need mentioning, and no Christian will! It was the approach used by Cyrus according to the bible and according to the cylinder seals in Babylonia. The new king signals the god's new pleasure, and honours his duty to restore the shrine.

So, Cyrus was making use of a standard convention, known to all senior officials in all countries but not known by the gullible masses who believed in their god! He was not being kind hearted to distressed religions as biblicists have pretended since the bible was subject to Christian exegesis. It was a standard administrative and diplomatic policy, widely used. The kings knew that the ordinary people, alienated by the punishments or incompetence of earlier kings, would see them as saviours.

In the Jewish scriptures, we read such statements as:

When the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon.

*Jer 25:11-12*

Jeremiah mentions the magic number of years again elsewhere (*Jer 29:10-14*). Isaiah has Yehouah punishing Tyre for 70 years (*Isa 23:15*). The choice of seventy is the recognized lifetime of any human being, and so a punishment of seventy years, in these ancient near eastern theologies, meant the generation of people now living could have had no responsibility for the crimes that had invited the god's original wrath. In administrative terms, it meant that the new ruler could "restore" the religion into a form that better suited his policies, and no one would be any the wiser. The priests, do not forget, were officials of the state. This is precisely what the Persians did in Yehud. The Persians restored the worship of Yehouah in a form that was utterly different from the Canaanite worship of Yehouah as a Baal. Now he was a god of heaven who acted through the Persian king. The equivalent in Babylon was that the fall of the city was presented as a divine act by Marduk. The city's god had chosen Cyrus and charged him to restore Marduk's religion, neglected by the neo-Babylonian rulers. There

is no doubt at all that Cyrus recruited the assistance of the priesthood of Marduk beforehand with the promise that he would indeed restore their religion. Babylon offered little resistance to the Medes and Persians.

The seventy years are mentioned in *2 Chronicles* 36:21, then *Ezra* begins immediately talking about the first year of Cyrus. *Zechariah* 1:12 speaks of the anger of Yehouah Sabaoth for seventy years, but put in the form of a question. While the seventy years seems a standard punishment period for serious crimes against a god, the supplicants in *Zechariah*, as in some of the psalms and elsewhere, seem exasperated that such an excessively long time had passed. The first six verses of *Zechariah* are an accusation that generations before the one living in the second year of Darius had been directed to return to the true god from their evil ways but had failed. This makes sense if the Darius spoken of is Darius II and the time is about 420 BC.

Earlier colonists had failed to win over the local population and had not set up the temple state, if that were indeed their task. *Isaiah* 40:2 says that Jerusalem had had double the punishment for all her crimes, an implication, perhaps, that around 140 years had passed, not merely seventy, suggesting that the period of redemption was in the fifth century, about the time that Nehemiah was said to have returned.

In the next ten verses, Zechariah says that God's extended wrath was now ended. He uses the "How long?" formula and repeats the seventy year formula. The "How long?" formula is common in the *Psalms* and elsewhere in the scriptures, but is also found in Sumerian and Akkadian laments and supplications as M E Cohen (*The Canonical Lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia*) has detailed.

The Persians use the prophet to put to the people their duty, now that the divine wrath had ended. Both the local Canaanites and the press-ganged colonists knew nothing at all about what had happened in Palestine 70 to 150 years before. They took their cues from the Persian propagandists—the prophets. This explains the "How long?" formula in *Psalms*, (eg *Ps* 70:10-11, 79:5, 80:4, 89:46) because the conventional period had long been exceeded.

How long, Yehouah, wilt thou be angry? For ever?

*Psalms* 79:5

The inquisitive "Forever?" implied that the period of punishment had been excessive. No one lived who could remember what the world was like before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the prophet was preparing them for a surprise—God's anger was soon to end. *Isaiah* expresses the same delay:

Be not wrath very sore, Yehouah, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.

*Isa* 63:7-64:11

The prophet urges that God should not be angry "indefinitely" or think of the people's sin "for ever". *Lamentations* has the same mood:

Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time? ...But thou hast utterly rejected us, thou art very wrath against us.

*Lam* 5:20

It is preparatory propaganda of the sort that would be naturally disbelieved after such a long period and so would look like a miracle when it came true. Its purpose was really to remind the people, after such a long time, that they still had a god rather than that his period of anger was up. Gods were the monarchs of the ancient near east and Isaiah is not called the “Salvation of Yehouah” for nothing—His message is that the divine king, Yehouah, was returning.

## Exiled Israel

After the colonization of Israel, the nation started to be called “Exiled Israel”, in the books now called the scriptures. Why should they have wanted to call themselves exiled when they had returned? If the Persian kings had allowed them to return to their former homeland after they had been abducted by the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, they ought to have been willing to show some gratitude to their new rulers and called themselves “Restored Israel”, or some similar name.

What also of the Judahites and the Israelites who were not taken away to the rivers of Babylon? Why would they have been willing to be called “Exiled Israel” when they had struggled for over seventy years to maintain a desolate country. The local people doubtless began to feel like exiles in their own land when the “returners” arrived and took over with the agreement of the Persian officials.

The author of *Chronicles* (2 Chr 36:20-21) wants us to believe that every last person in the Palestinian Hills had been removed to Babylonia and to Medea, leaving the country empty of people except for a few passing Arabs. No one remained behind, so the whole population were “returners” and had been “exiled”. The Deuteronomic Historian gives the same idea with the last Israelites leaving after the murder of Gedaliah, and the narrative petering out with the fate of the exiled royalty in Babylonia. The author of *Jeremiah* leaves the narrative at this same point. It is not likely or feasible and other parts of the scriptures contradict it. P R Bedford writes:

The tendentious view of the Hebrew narratives of *Ezra* is that the land was devoid of Judaeans after 587 BC, thus whoever the repatriats found there could not have been legitimate Judaeans.

Even after 70 years in exile, people who could preserve such careful histories and were obsessively concerned with genealogies ought to have been willing and delighted to trace their relatives among those who had been left behind. Yet the “returners” treat those they found still in the land as foreigners, arguing that no one had *been* left behind. The people who returned were confident they had no relatives in Yehud because their ancestors were not from there. They had no relatives among the Am ha Eretz because they were different people deported in as colonists by the Persian government.

Yet the colonists themselves *were* exiles! They had been deported from some distant country to be the colonists of Yehud. Now, with the authority of the Persian government, they—the colonists—could assert that they were the only legitimate Jews! Those that had remained in Judaea when the skilled classes were taken off were not legitimate Jews even if they were legitimate Judaeans. So, both groups of people had cause to describe themselves as exiles in what was ordained as their own country! The locals would only have a chance of becoming Jews by accepting the rulership of the colonists and collaborating with them in every respect as agents of the Persian conquerors. That is what the Persians understood by a Jew wherever they lived in their



empire and they were happy to allow them the privileges of a local ruling class subject only to the Persians themselves as long as they remained loyal. Mainly they did.

The return of *Ezra* 1-2 has been considered by the scholars to have been written to mimic the occupation of the land originally by Joshua, but the truth is Hegelian—the myth of the “Exodus” and Joshua was an allegory of the colonization of Yehud! It was not a return but an occupation of an alien land, just as the tribes under Joshua were considered to have done. The colonists were not expatriot Israelites but people from “*eber niri*”, “across the river”, Hebrews, the generic expression for anyone across the river in either direction, but which was predominantly applied to the lands to the west of the Euphrates, by the Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians in the east. The natives were the Canaanites just as they were in the conquest stories. The new people were sent by the shah as “saviours”, to restore the old neglected ways of the Israelites. The word for saviour keeps appearing from then on in the stories invented to justify the colonisation—Hosea, Joshua, Isaiah, Elisha, and ultimately in Jesus!

The ordinary people will not have been intended to have any rational account of the colonization. It was presented to them as allegory set in the distant past to give the new country being forged a sense of antiquity. The Persian propagandists were remarkably successful! It is likely that the accounts of Ezra and Nehemiah were for the eyes only of the topmost priests, and only emerged into the open through the destruction of texts in the Jewish civil war, and even then in a confused state, so they were reconstructed by the successful Maccabees and became part of the scriptures contrary to the intentions of the Persians. But this was after the victories of Alexander, in Greek times!

In *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* only the colonists are “returners” and are called Israel and even “All Israel”. The allegory of the exodus is mentioned showing it was familiar to the people by the time that *Ezra* was compiled about 200 years later. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both say the land is empty or has some inhabitants who do not matter because they are not of the House of Israel. Contradicting this, Ezekiel says there was indeed a body of people still living in the land who were descendants of Abraham (*Ezek* 33:24-29), but Yehouah would destroy them:

Say thou thus unto them, Thus saith Yehouah Elohim; As I live, surely they that are in the wastes shall fall by the sword, and him that is in the open field will I give to the beasts to be devoured, and they that be in the forts and in the caves shall die of the pestilence. For I will lay the land most desolate, and the pomp of her strength shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, that none shall pass through.

*Ezek* 33:27-28

They were, of course, wicked and so deserved it! Jeremiah has the same (*Jer* 24:1-10). For Jeremiah, the exiles are only those taken with Jehoiakim to Babylon.

*Isaiah* 40-55 gives the allegory of the “return” and the “exodus”. In the exodus allusions in *Ezra* and *Isaiah*, the audience are led to identify with those brought “out of Egypt”. Egypt is the enemy and the changes being brought about were meant to dispose the audience of the Persian prophets against Egypt. *Isaiah* 52:11-12 suggests that the “return” from “exile” is greater than the exodus from Egypt. These parallels identify Ezra with Moses and Egypt with Babylon.

Really, the exodus was psychological. It was a propaganda exodus in which the people of the Levant, long in the cultural shadow of Egypt and in many cases her actual colonies, were to be led away to an ostensible influence but practical dependence on the east—Persia. The divine law of the Jews, in the Pentateuchal saga, was given to a people who had no land, and the people already living in the land they were to occupy in the myth knew nothing about this law. The invaders are shown as having the law when they enter the “Promised Land”, and forced it upon those there on pain of death. The patriarchal narratives and the *Pentateuch* show Israel as outsiders in opposition to the inhabitants of the land they had moved to. We are reading an allegory of the “return” not any actual history.

The law given to the confused mass of former Egyptian slaves was that of a settled and civilized society, not anything that wandering slaves could devise. Doubtless gods and fairy-godmothers can produce out of their conjuring bag whatever they like, but reality demands that experience should lie behind historical events. An unsettled people could not have invented or even had need for the law of a settled and civilized people. If, then, the Israelites had the law before they had a land, it must have been given to them by some civilized country and not by God, and it must have been imposed, for otherwise no one would have taken any notice of it. In fact, psalms such as *Psalms* 126 and *Psalms* 137 are propaganda aimed at persuading the Canaanites (the Am ha Eretz and the Samaritans) to put their interests with the colonists.

## **An Empty Land?**

Yet *Chronicles* emphasises the emptiness of the land, which therefore needed no conquest, and scarcely mentions one, or even an exodus. For this author, Judaism began with those who “returned”, not those who mythically came out of Egypt conquering. If the land was empty, at the “return”, then *all* of the people must have been carried off, and *none* of them could have returned prematurely by finding their way back on their own initiative in the intervening decades.

*Jeremiah* 52:16 admits that poor people were left behind in the hill country when the leading families were banished. *Nehemiah* 9:6-37 reviews Israel’s past without mentioning an exile. *Isaiah* 6:11-13 speaks of a remnant left in the land with no context of an exile or a return. The word “Israel” is surprisingly uncommon in some biblical books, such as *Haggai*, and the biblical concept of it as the exiled people of God might have been largely a product of post-colonial mythologizing to legitimize colonial rule.

The myth that only “exiled Israel” was Israel excluded everyone except the colonists who were almost certainly not Israel! Local people, whether Judahites (Am ha Eretz) or Samaritans were excluded, and indeed so were all of those who worshipped the Canaanite Yehouah instead of the version brought by the Persian colonists. We know this from the Elephantine letter.

That the Babylonians exiled most of the inhabitants of Judah is historically unlikely, contradicted by clear archaeological evidence, and undermined by several biblical texts.

Ehud Ben Zvi

Nothing in the archaeology suggests a disruption of occupation sufficient to produce the signs that a long period of desolation would entail. Jeremiah and Ezekiel contradict the hypothesis of a total abduction of the population because people are mentioned as still living in Judah. What is more, Jeremiah tells us that Neburazadan exiled

another 745 Judahites even though the land was already “empty”. The explanation is that the biblical authors paid no regard to the peasantry. If the land was empty of nobility and craftsmen, then it was empty. Such an emptiness could produce another 745 people for exile if the authorities decided they might provoke trouble!

Similar contradictions occur in the tales about the total exile of the so-called ten northern tribes. The Assyrians abducted the entire population of Israel and brought in foreign colonists to replace them (2 Kg 17:24-33). Thus the people of Samaria could not have been of the same ethnos as the people in Judah. Supposedly, this is why the Samaritans and the Jews hate each other until this day. Yet, read on in 2 Kings and the northerners are treated as Israelites and Yehouah is their true god (2 Kg 17:34-41)!

The scriptures describe Samaria as vanquished by the Assyrians (*Mic* 1:6-7; *Ezek* 16:44-52; 23:31-34; 2 Kg 17:5-23; 21:10-14) and a similar fate is offered as a warning to Jerusalem, yet Samaria was not destroyed, and nor were all of its people banished. The destruction was of Samaria as an independent political entity and not in the sense of physical destruction and decimation of the people as biblicists always read it. Samaria became a regional capital of Assyria and Israelites remained in the province.



**Cyrus the Great cylinder, one of many in which the Persian king tells the Babylonians that he is the choice of their god, Marduk as his regent on earth to restore him to his rightful glory. The bible has Yehouah saying the same about Cyrus to the Jews.**

Babylon is described in similar exeggerated terms. It is razed and its gods humbled (*Isa* 13:1-22; 46:1-2; *Jer* 50:1-51:64) yet Cyrus did nothing of the kind. He won Babylon with hardly a fight and with little damage and he praised its god, Marduk, saying he had succeeded because it was the god's will, and to prove it he undertook to restore his temples and purify his priesthood. Too many copies of the Cyrus cylinder say this even for Christians to deny it. Yet Babylon was destroyed as Samaria was because it ceased to exist as a political entity in its own right, even though it became one of the capitals of the Persian empire. People of 2,500 years ago were more sophisticated than modern day theologians. They knew that when this was read out, it was political propaganda—warnings to the listeners not to trifle with the political might of god's agent on earth.

The Babylonians deported the ruling class from among the people of the Palestinian hills leaving the country with a slightly depleted population, but without any or many knowledgeable and skilled people to run the economy. Economic hardship will have been likely to have taken the population further down in succeeding years. No evidence has emerged that the Babylonians deported anyone into Judah from elsewhere, and the country was scarcely an attraction to economic migrants, despite the biblical stories. Ehud Ben Zvi writes:

The only circumstances that could have led to an ethno-demographic change of significant proportions...

are those associated with imperial policies of forced population movements.

The people of neo-Babylonian Judah were therefore the same people that had lived there before the Babylonian conquest. They were Canaanites who became inhabitants of a minor Babylonian province, then of a minor Achaemenid province, which however, was later to be promoted to a temple state of international importance. Some biblical texts admit the poor remained in the land and took possession of it (2 *Kg* 25:12; *Jer* 39:10; 52:16, 28-30; *Ezek* 33:24-29) and only the elite were deported (2 *Kg* 24:14). Yet, even transportation of the elite was not total. Some of the Judahite nobility can have been relied upon to have supported the conqueror, and would not have been deported with the rest, but left behind as safe hands loyal to the conqueror, yet commanding a degree of support among the people, and rewarded with local power, like Gedaliah (2 *Kg* 25:22).

The supposition is that the descendants of exiled nobility returned to claim their erstwhile possessions, after at least three generations in a distant land. In those generations abroad, according to the interpretation of the biblicists, the exiled Jews had become wealthy bankers and merchants, influential at the center of a great commercial empire, yet had an ancestral urge to return to trimming vines and herding sheep on limestone crags. We have to suppose that, despite this astonishing success, the exiles were still interested in, and could still remember, what was theirs, and wanted to return from sophisticated living in a center of civilization to a bucolic life in rocky and dessicated hills.

It is not as though their return could have been simple, whether other people lived there or not. The ownership of confiscated land went to the Babylonian king, and income from renting it to the poor Judahites who remained behind went into his coffers via local administrators. With the Persian conquest of Babylonia, the land went to the Persian king, and evidently was parcelled out on his orders. If we accept the biblical implication that the Persian kings made a grant of their Judahite estates to the exiled nobility, we have to consider how they would make a legal claim. The exiled nobles must be presumed to have taken with them some form of legal entitlement, or lesser relatives and retainers in Judah must have kept the claims. The bible certainly implies that ideas of such repossession were held, but they were easier to write into a myth than to preserve in documentary form for seventy years at a time when documents were written on tablets of clay, and not in personal organizers.

Nor would the neo-Babylonian administration have looked favourably upon servants of banned nobles causing trouble any more than they would have looked favourably upon banned nobles themselves doing the same. Laying claim to confiscated land whether locally or from exile could only have been considered a nuisance, if not foolish and dangerous because it was a criticism of the king. The same is true of scribes, if any were left in such a derelict country. Local Babylonian administrators would hardly let them make written claims for confiscated land without retort. The examples which appear in the bible are simply part of the later claim to ownership and legitimacy made by the Persian colonists, who were *de facto* the new nobility whether the old nobility liked it or not.

While 2 *Kings* says 10,000 were taken captive, to judge from *Jeremiah* (*Jer* 52:28-30), the number was 4,600, of an estimated original population of 65,000. Approaching ten percent of the population is a large nobility, if that is what the 4,600 represents, but some of those carried off must have been craftsmen, and the scriptures admit that not all were nobles (2 *Kg* 24:14-16). After successfully grubbing in commercial ventures in a distant land, it is doubtful whether they would seventy years later have considered themselves still nobles of a backward country. If they still had the stamp of nobility after that time, it remains doubtful that any wise monarch

would let them return unsupervised and claim land in a part of his realm causing dissension and disruption in a country that had been pacified enough to have remained peaceful for three generations.

The whole idea of people simply deciding to up-and-out of Babylonian slavery to journey to Palestine there to claim a patch of land that the king had been letting peacefully to another tenant for decades is absurd. The whole process can only be rationalized as being a government organized venture.

These expatriot nobles would have been returning to wrench from the descendants of people rewarded by previous kings for loyalty. Loyalty is what all kings wanted and only foolish kings would risk stirring up dissension unless they had utter control over what went on. The Persian kings were mainly not foolish. So, the return could only have happened officially, not as piecemeal expeditions like the wagon trains of the wild west, and the only official ventures of this kind made by ancient near eastern monarchs were mass deportations, not assisted passages for voluntary repatriation of displaced families. Ben Zvi writes:

It is impossible to assess whether the new settlers—all or most of them—were descendants of the Judahites exiled by Nebuchadnezzar or included different people...

Whether some were descendants of Judahites or not, they were “Israel” because those who were deported into Yehud were so defined. The Babylonian conquest in *Nehemiah* 9:21-30 is just a severe instance in a series of defeats and setbacks suffered by Israel. The exile is not mentioned among them. There was no exile!

The identification of the colonists as being Israel, and only them, plainly laid out their rights. They were not rights they could have simply taken at the expense of other people living on the land, as if there were no law, or as if the returners were bandits who could ignore it. They had to have had the approval of the government and the government must have conferred on to the settlers whatever rights they had. Any transfer of lands must have been done under the rule of law, and it would not have been feasible for many small groups of “returners” to have claimed land rights over a long period. That is why the claims of Ezra and Nehemiah that all of the “exiles” returned at once cannot be far wrong. The impression is that there were more than one such expedition under different kings but only one or two of them seemed to succeed—that is achieve the objectives that the administration had set them as colonists. Military organization would have been needed for the peaceful transportation of such large numbers of people.

K G Hoglund reports that the archaeology of this period supports an increase in rural settlements in Persian Yehud compared with neo-Babylonian Judah. However, the archaeology does not suggest that the new settlers occupied ancestral lands, but that they opened up new uncultivated plots on the king's estates or re-opened land which had fallen into disuse. Perhaps, these settlers had been displaced by the returners who reclaimed old holdings, but the king had obviously provided for the displaced tenants elsewhere on his own property. Though this might seem equitable in some measure, it must have still cause discontent because then the displaced tenants must have been displaced on to more marginal land, while the colonists had the fertile plots. Once the colonists had settled and started propagandizing, the apparently rigid refusal to accept anyone as Israel except the colonists would melt at the edges. The Persians knew that their colonists had to be in control, and that was the point of the restriction, but their intention was to forge an ultimate unity. It had, though, to be on colonial terms, whence the rigidity of the admission procedure. Everyone who wanted to join Israel had to accept the terms and conditions. Anthropologists have shown that ethnic boundaries can never be kept distinct.

A formerly undesirable family becomes rich or influential, then everyone wants to know them. Modern Jews know this as well as anyone. It was true then. Samaritans and Am ha Eretz were admitted into Israel once they were ready to accept the new cult. That it was a prestigious government project helped.

*Ezra* 6:22 and *Nehemiah* 10:29 clearly say that the local Canaanites would be accepted into the congregation of the returners provided that they accepted the new cult, and the provisions for it watched over by the colonists. Genealogies to us are fixed—they represent history—but anthropologists have shown repeatedly that for most people they are flexible, varying according to present day circumstances, not what once was. “Invented tradition” is well studied but has made no impact on what clergy teach their congregations. E Hobsbawm and T Ranger edited *The Invention of Tradition* as long ago as 1983, so biblical scholars have had plenty of time to consider its implications for biblical veracity. Indeed, R R Wilson in *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* concentrates on just this specific issue. Few have bothered because scholarship is not the true aim of the devoutly religious. Written tradition is scarcely less malleable than oral. When necessary, genealogies were altered. Their purpose was not to permanently exclude fellow countrymen but to exclude strangers, so even strangers were admitted into the fellowship when they became seen as countrymen.

We have no lists of those who were excluded from Israel to compare with those who were admitted according to the genealogies. When a genealogy says that such a family returned with Ezra, who later was in a position to contradict? Acceptable local families were written into the genealogies probably from their creation, surely after. Scholars know this and can make good guesses about some of the families who never returned because they were associated quite plainly with local towns.

## **The Second Temple**

In *1 Kings* 6:2, the first temple is given as 60 cubits long, 20 wide and 30 high, about 90 x 30 x 45, in feet. Cyrus apparently declared that the temple would be 60 cubits wide and 60 cubits high, but he forgot to say how long it was. If its length was the same as the first temple then the building was a 90 foot cube—quite a striking structure, one might think, but not striking enough for anyone in the scriptures to remark upon. It looks suspicious. The most complete description of the second temple, also suspiciously, occurs in the supposed edict of Cyrus (*Ezra* 6:3-4), inclining the critical reader to think that the edict has been recast at a later date to highlight the temple. Persians at the time of Cyrus had no temples, other than possibly a few for keeping the sacred fire, and most worship was outdoors on grassy plains or bare hill tops. There is a largely hidden struggle in the scriptures between people who worshipped in “high places” and those who wanted a sanctuary. Those who worshipped in high places were identified as worshippers of Baal, but underlying this rationalization (or slander) might have been a dispute between those in the hill country who wanted *al fresco* Persian style worship and those who preferred enclosed Canaanite style worship—in a temple. The latter won.

Even if there had been a Solomon's temple, it is quite likely that the site was not merely ruined but cleared. If there had never been a Solomon's temple, but instead a high place (bamah) then no ruins would have been present merely a parched and well trodden hilltop, with an altar. The word translated “waste” and “ruins” (*Hag* 1:4,9) strictly means “dry” or “desolate” or “desert”. By extension it is read as “ruins”. The punning reference to the temple site in *Haggai* 1:10-11, is to barrenness from dryness and drought. The mountain upon which the temple was built was called “Horeb”, meaning “a dry place” but translated as ruins from the expectation of the translators that a previous temple had stood there. By one of those curiosities that God has chosen to dot all



over his sacred works, the Akkadian for “dry” is “shalmu”, a word cognate with Solomon! Moreover, the mention of “ceiled” houses (*Hag* 1:4) might mean that God’s original “house” had no ceiling because it was an *afresco* temple.

Though there is supposed to be no temple in *Haggai*, priests and Levites are being supported by tithes, sacrifices being offered and prayers said. If there was no built temple, all of this must have been done outdoors in the Persian fashion, at an altar under the sky. The story that the initial returners at the time of Cyrus set up an altar, with no mention of a temple (*Ezra* 3:2-3), suggests that here was a Persian style of temple—simply an altar open to the elements. This Persian “high place” type of sanctuary seems to have lasted for a hundred years. The acceptance of a demand for an enclosed temple points to the second Babylonian Darius, not the Persian one, as king. The second Darius, much more influenced by Babylonian practice than Persian, is more likely to have agreed to a built temple.

It seems a local governor allowed the local people to raise an altar on the dry hilltop overlooking Jerusalem, apparently a traditional Canaanite High Place. Thereafter nothing further significant happened for a hundred years, although groups of colonists were sent in by the Persians. If raising a temple was a part of their brief, it was not an important part, because they did not do it. In the mid-fifth century, the local people possibly showed too much favour to the Egyptians in a revolt, or perhaps it was Megabyxos that they favoured.

The Persian kings therefore decided to set up a temple state run by more determined or more pressurized colonists deported into the country and charged with the duty of raising revenue from Abarnahara for the shahansha, and defending a line of fortresses set up against Egypt. To do this they had to use the local Canaanites as labour and therefore had to persuade them that it was in their own interest to give support—support in the donkey work, but no input in the designing and building. The colonists were elements of the ruling classes of some other conquered and troublesome people, and were able but precarious in their elite situation. The only identifiable references to the “second” temple in the scriptures are those of Zechariah and Haggai. There are detailed accounts in the scriptures of the Mosaic holy dwelling place of God, the temple of Solomon and the visionary temple of Ezekiel, but there is no description of the second temple, other than scraps that can be found by diligent reading, and these, unsurprisingly, are not too revealing. No mention of Solomon in *Haggai*, nor in *Zechariah* nor in *Ezra*, except in the genealogies that were added later, even suggest this was a second temple, and the solitary mention in *Nehemiah*, other than in genealogies, looks interpolated. Christians commentators talk without a blush about the second temple, and never seem to wonder about the peculiarity of its uncommonness in the text.

Elsewhere in the prophets, Yehouah lives in his “Holy Mountain” (*Obad* 16; *Zeph* 3:11; *Joel* 3:17; *Isa* 65:11,75). *Isaiah* mentions the “courts of my sanctuary” (*Isa* 62:9). The vision of *Isaiah* 6 is typical of romanticized visions of God in his abode, but might be based on sight of the interior of a temple. *Jeremiah* mentions the “chambers” of the house of Yehouah (*Jer* 35:2), and Baruch reads the scroll to the people in a temple “chamber”. Not a lot of information to work on about the second temple.

The local Israelites were utterly sullen and unco-operative, indeed disruptive and distraught when the temple was opened. *Zechariah* 4:6-10 describes a foundation laying ritual closely similar to the Mesopotamian Kalu festival, but, in *Haggai* 2:3 and *Ezra* 3:12, there are plenty of people who are not happy at the building of the foundation, excused as the tears of joy of those who could still remember the temple before it was destroyed.

But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy.

Remember this is a minimum of 70 years after the temple was destroyed, even by the bible's own sequence of things, so these weeping old men were indeed ancient. In fact, it was another 100 years after that and the people were not weeping out of joy. It was despair that the future was more oppression for the native people of Yehud.

The locals had shown some interest in the new project at first, since the god to be honoured was, on the face of it, one of their own gods, but they had not seemed inclined to build much for him themselves, until the new Persian endeavour began. If they had really been waiting for a sign that Yehouah's wrath was over, then the defeat of the Babylonians and Cyrus's apparently liberal edicts ought to have been sufficient. They did not jump at the opportunity until someone else—the colonists sent in by the administration—began to build. Then they took their cue.

It will have needed all the prophetic propaganda that the Persian colonists could muster. The building of the temple was an eschatological act, it was to be accompanied by the submission of the nations to the king Yehouah, meaning the other nations of Abarnahara—the Hebrew nations. Yehouah was the “king” of these nations as well as the Jews. If the Canaanites were waiting for Yehouah to first announce himself as king before they built any temple to Him, then the propaganda of Haggai and Zechariah was to disillusion them. The building of the temple had to precede any kingship of Yehouah!

The accounts of the building of the first temple and the ceremonies associated with them have to be seen in the reverse way of convention. Conventionally, the bible is a true chronology. It is not. The similarities of the descriptions of the building and dedication of the second temple are seen as deliberate literary reflexions of the ancient original events in the ancient history of the Israelites in the United Monarchy. If there never was a united monarchy, all of this history is false. In fact, the mythical histories of the Deuteronomic Historian and the Chronicler are retrojected elaborations of the dedication of the so-called “second” temple. The second temple is the first temple of Yehouah, and the so-called first temple is a mythologized excuse for the second temple.

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of Yehouah, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise Yehouah, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto Yehouah; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised Yehouah, because the foundation of the house of Yehouah was laid.

*Ezra 3:10-12*

And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place: (for all the priests that were present were sanctified, and did not then wait by course: Also the Levites which were the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, being arrayed in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets). It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were

as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking Yehouah; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised Yehouah, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of Yehouah; So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of Yehouah had filled the house of God.

2 Chr 5:11-14

These descriptions purport to be of different events 500 years apart in time! The authors can only have known the regalia and ceremonial of the temple of the time when they lived—the “second” temple!

There is widespread agreement that the temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt under Achaemenid auspices, and some would even say it was mandated by the Persians.

Ehud Ben Zvi

Among the “some” is J Blenkinsopp whose belief is that the Persians were responsible for the foundation of the temple. They were therefore responsible for founding Judaism. There should be no doubt about this. The project could not have been undertaken without Persian preparation and planning, even transporting in a large number of colonists to undertake and complete it. The bible makes no bones about it, although biblicists, enchanted by Moses or Jesus never get as far as reading Ezra and Nehemiah. Although the Achaemenids were known to have restored temples in other countries they had conquered, it had the political purpose of strengthening the local nobility, and ensured that local rulers were dependant, obedient and loyal to the shahanshah in return. Bill Gates gives free PCs to the schools. He does not give them a donation in cash to spend on Apple Macs! Altruistic acts are rarely as selfless as they look, and the Persian kings did not restore temples for charity’s sake. The god worshipped in the temple and his priests acknowledged the Persian king as his Khalif on earth—no less than the god himself acting through his appointed or his anointed human being.

### **Nehemiah the Fire Priest**

According to 2 *Maccabees* 1:18, Nehemiah was a more influential man than even Nehemiah’s own book says he was. He rebuilt the temple, the altar and offered sacrifices, and even brought the fire, that the priests had secretly preserved from Solomon’s temple, back from its hiding place in the captivity! If this seems remarkable to you, it is. The worship of fire is a characteristic of Persian religion and when a sacred flame was brought back from Persia, supposedly preserved from an earlier Israelite flame, then there is good reason to smell a rat. Aryan herdsmen on the steppes preferred to keep their flames permanently lit because it was a tedious business lighting one afresh. The “thick water” that allowed the sacred flame to be ignited by a miracle (2 *Macc* 1:20-22) is obviously oil, of which there is no small amount around Babylon, and the story gave us words like naphthalene. Nehemiah prays to God, calling him the “only and gracious king”. He thanks God for saving Israel from all trouble and for choosing the fathers and sanctifying them. The references are all to the acts of the Persian king in sending the colonists to Israel. All Jews and Christians will doubtless read “the fathers” as Abraham and his sons but they are obviously the colonists who were literally—like the men on the Mayflower—the founding fathers of Judaism.

The story in 2 *Maccabees* finishes with a common biblical trick, which is to attribute the holiness of something backward in time to the thing revered in Judaism. It is an aetiological explanation of a holy place in Persia where

the sacred flame of the Jerusalem temple had been secretly kept. In fact, of course, the sacred flame of the Jerusalem altar was brought from a more original sacred flame kept burning somewhere in Persia. Thus was Jerusalem made the center of the world. The first temple for this flame, at least, was some temple in Persia.

It is the Achaemenid king who is the true founder of the temple not David. Ezra lists four of them (*Ezra* 6:14-15), Cyrus, Darius, Artaxerxes and Darius again, but scarcely a single commentator has deduced from this sequence that the second Darius cannot have been the first one, as they all assume. The sixth year of Darius II is meant. If David founded the temple, then David is a clumsy approximation for the name of the Persian king, Daryavahu. The Samaritans were the Canaanites of the northern hills. They had not been deported by the Babylonians and so could not have “returned”. They were not Israel even though Israel is the place where they lived. They had not been allowed any say in how the temple project was undertaken, but they could join Israel by accepting the colonists’ way of doing things. Many actually did and proof occurs in the Apocryphal books. *Tobit* is about an exiled Samaritan of the tribe of Naphthali who attended Jerusalem for all its festivals and sent the appropriate tithes. *Judith* also describes a Samaritan Jew. Coins, bullae and papyri show that in Persian times many Samaritans worshipped Yehouah, and the Elephantine priests saw Samaria as just as important a place to seek help as Jerusalem. Curiously, the iconography of the bullae and coins, comprehensively described in the 90s, are Hellenized, even at such an early date, as they are too in Yehud, suggesting the possibility that there were Greeks among the colonists sent by the Persians into Abarnahara.

The Samaritan *Pentateuch* seemed not to differ from the Jewish one at this time, perhaps because they were little more than *Deuteronomy*. The scriptures of Samaritans and Jews seemed not to vary until the time of Hyrcanus who oppressed the Samaritans. They had chosen Gerizim as the site of their own temple, apparently being more orthodox than the Jerusalem Yehouists (*Dt* 11:29; 27:12; *Josh* 8:33).

These are fossils of the first colonists in Yehud who had not been directed to centralize worship in Jerusalem, and possibly did not even agree on whether El of Yehouah should have been designated as Ahuramazda. By the time Greek influence was pushing out the original Persian from the temple, it was the Samaritans who had become defensive of the Persian traditions, aided apparently by the Essenes. Both rejected the Hellenized Sadducees.

By this stage the Samaritans decided to reject the polemic against them in the scriptures and so rejected the *Prophets* and the *Writings* which were too propagandistic. Samaritan coins bearing the name Jeroboam are found from the fourth century BC. It is a hint of when the fiction of the early Samaritan king, Jeroboam, might have been written. It also suggests that some of this history might have begun as parody and been written up as serious history by someone without a sense of humour, or too far later on for them to understand the satirical allusions.

Ben Zvi points out that:

Even the most drastic reforms were presented as supported by tradition, and—because reforms break the actual continuity with the past—as a restoration of the “traditional” (often invented by the reformer’s propaganda).

So, breaking the continuity with the past to pursue imperial aims was presented to the people as a “restoration”

of abandoned tradition.

In summary:

- ❑ The Persian kings transported Babylonian immigrants into Yehud to set up the temple and community in Jerusalem.
- ❑ The temple and community was based on Babylonian models showing it was not early in the lifetime of the Persian empire, but when it had transferred its capital to Babylon.
- ❑ Other worshippers, even of Yehouah were not admitted unless they accepted the leadership of the temple community.
- ❑ The temple community provided administrative, social, economic, and political leadership as well as religious leadership to the nations of the region it served—called “Beyond the River” (Abarnahara), subject to imperial commands.
- ❑ The temple community collected revenue and acted as a treasury for the Persian exchequer.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 3. Ezra & The Law**  
**The Foundation of Judaism (Part I):**  
*The Work of Nehemiah and Ezra*

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## **Ezra and Nehemiah I**

In the modern bible, *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* are presented as two separate books. Quite why is anybody's guess because they are only a single book as everyone interested knows. Doubtless clerics will tell us it is tradition, but it is more likely to be dishonesty intended to fool religious innocents, because this is the key to the foundation of Judaism, and the clerics prefer it to be confused to keep their flocks confused. To make sure it is thoroughly confused and that no one can understand what is happening, even if they can be bothered to read it, the book has also been mixed up!

These two books together with the two books of *Chronicles*—also just one book really—are an attempt at a complete history of the Jews from Adam to the time it was written, seemingly the fifth century BC. The original material comprising it was written in the Persian period, but it was edited after the end of the 200 years of Persian rule rather than near its beginning as it pretends. *2 Chronicles* ends with the same verses as the beginning of *Ezra* seemingly showing that they were part of the same work. Yet *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* was admitted into the Jewish canon before *Chronicles*, which is the last book in it, having been accepted last. They certainly seem to have been redacted by people with a similar outlook, but the connexion by repeating verses seems an obvious trick, so there might be no link other than through a school of editors.

John C H How, who was a scholar of Trinity College Cambridge, tells us that *Ezra-Nehemiah* is of great importance because it covers the years 537 BC to almost 300 BC, when “the real foundation of Judaism with its rigid exclusivism and its intense devotion to the Law of Moses were laid”. The genealogies at the end take us to Jaddua who was a High Priest only a few decades before Alexander conquered Persia. In fact, the events in *Ezra-Nehemiah* mainly take place in a 30 year period in the reigns of Artaxerxes I and Darius II, but How is right that this is the foundation of Judaism.

L E Browne, in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, has no doubt that the work of the priestly school called “The Chronicler” that wrote these books displays the same outlook as that of the authors of the Priestly Code (P) of *Genesis*. Elements of P are found in *Ezra-Nehemiah* but they are interpolations. The law that the book is concerned with is *Deuteronomy*. The emphasis of the Priestly Code on the priesthood, temple worship and on the paraphernalia of it, that plainly took a good length of time to evolve after *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* founded Judaism, puts P late, in Ptolemaic or Maccabaeen times. *2 Maccabees* 2:17 says what the Maccabees were up to:

God... delivered all his people and gave them all an heritage, and the kingdom, and the priesthood and the sanctuary...

*Chronicles*, *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* are full of genealogies and this fondness for them, and more particularly the



inclination to compile them and invent what was not known, was a habit of men of leisure—the temple priesthood of a much later time, again the time of the Ptolemies or the Maccabees—intent on giving an antiquity to their own profession and to the Jewish nation as a whole that had in reality just been founded. M E Meeker, studying Semitic tribes in Arabia, has shown that tribal genealogies reflected ideological beliefs not actual historical lines. The early part of *Chronicles* is written as a genealogy to get the reader quickly to the time of David when the author wants to begin the tale proper. That is because the Hasmonaeans were intent on legitimizing the reign of the Hasmonaeans by showing that they were simply re-establishing the kingdom of David of old. There had been no kingdom of David, of course—they made it up as an ancient reflexion of the Hasmonaeans kingdom! *Ezra-Nehemiah* consists of three main parts based on content and style:

1. *Ezra* 1-6, a history from the first year of Cyrus to the sixth year of Darius.
2. *Ezra* 7-10, the story of Ezra told in a different style.
3. *Nehemiah*, the story of Nehemiah.

## 1 Esdras

Unlike the *Pentateuch* that has to be analysed purely from its internal clues, *Ezra-Nehemiah* has an extra external source to help—*1 Esdras*, a book included in the *Apocrypha*. This Greek version of the combined *Ezra-Nehemiah* shows some of the redactional activity that has led to the two separate versions we now have. These revisions are from the mid-second century BC when the Jewish scriptures were compiled from what remained after the civil war, as *2 Maccabees* 2:13-14 declares. It offers an acceptable explanation for the chronological mix up of the books, though it is hard to understand why those who were supposedly so familiar with them did not notice the blunders.

So, what we seem to have are two different attempts to put together the fragments of the works that remained or could be remembered. Neither is correct. The authors had forgotten the order of the Persian kings, just as the author of *Daniel*, writing at about the same time had. It shows that what we have today is not genuinely from the Persian period.

Curiously *1 Esdras* does not mention Nehemiah. It might be a deliberate intention to ignore the Persian administrator in favour of the supposed Jewish priest, Ezra, but since *1 Esdras* ends with the same Greek words as *Nehemiah* 8:13, words absent in the Hebrew texts, *Nehemiah* might have been meant to follow *1 Esdras*, which is therefore itself incomplete. Whole sections of *1 Esdras* can be seen in different parts of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*.

The leader of the first “returners”, Zerubabel, was considered the messiah by Haggai and Zechariah who made him the grandson of Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) a man who went into captivity in 597 BC. Joshua, Zerubabel’s companion, is the son of Jehozadak, the High Priest in 587 BC who is also the son of Seraiah, the father of Ezra (*Ezra* 7:1-5, *1 Chr* 6:14-15). Ezra then is the brother of the High Priest of 587 BC and the uncle of Joshua who returned about 520 BC, while he himself returned in 458 BC at the earliest. Doubtless Jews and Christians will see the hand of God in these miraculous relationships, but it really shows that whoever made up the chronologies had no clear idea of the times involved.

They had the idea that most of the people “returned” together just a few years after Cyrus issued his decree.

The lists of “returners” in *Ezra* 2:1-67 and in *Nehemiah* 7:6-69 are essentially the same, but they purport to be the first “returners” under Sheshbazzar in *Ezra* and the contemporary “returners” in *Nehemiah*. They thought Seraiah and Jehozadak could have had children in captivity who returned about 536 BC, and had no idea that Ezra was returning much later still.

Bits of *Ezra* are in Aramaic (*Ezra* 5:1-6:18; *Ezra* 4:5; *Ezra* 4:6-23; *Ezra* 7:12-26) suggesting that an Aramaic book was a source of the original, or an attempt to imply that it was. All four bits of Aramaic refer to the actions of Persian kings in respect of the Jews, so seem to be a hint of genuine chancellery archive. Perhaps they were, but were destroyed when Nehemiah’s library was scattered, and all we have are later imperfect reconstructions. Or, perhaps, they were composed deliberately to give a false impression. Whether fraudulent or a sincere attempt at restoration of something lost, they are not genuine now.

Some scholars question the truth of these bits of Jewish history, and indeed, it is questionable whether the policy was implemented by Cyrus or by Darius. In the interest of creating a history for his colony, Darius might have applied the decree of Cyrus to the colonists who had no idea originally that it applied to them because, in truth, they were being deported. Evidence of this is that *1 Esdras* has Darius where *Ezra* has Cyrus.

M Dandamaev and A Lukanin (*The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*) state that there are “no grounds for speaking of a special benevolence toward Judaism on the part of the Persian king”. The supposed benevolence of the Persian kings to Judaism depends purely on the bible itself. The Persians have been considered as benevolent to the cults within the empire, the Cyrus Cylinder being an oft-cited example of this generosity. Yet what seems to be benevolence in these propagandist works actually was carefully calculated to give political advantage, as Amelie Kuhrt has shown for the Cyrus Cylinder itself.

Cyrus drew upon the form of Mesopotamian building texts to show himself as a pious monarch dedicated to restoring cults neglected and damaged by Nabonidus. He authorized the restoration of privileges to temples in Babylonia and Assyria. Kuhrt says he did it to restore the religious *status quo ante* to gain support from these areas and their priesthoods. The kings sought the favour of populations to give no basis for revolution, and they wanted a reliable and trusted organization for the collection of taxes. So whatever altruism the kings seemed to offer would be multiply repaid by a grateful people.

But the Persians destroyed the temples of people who resisted their power. Darius I destroyed the temple at Didyma involved in the Ionian revolt (Herodotus 6.18–20). The leaders of the temple in Elephantine claimed that by the power of Cambyses, “all the temples of the gods of Egypt were overthrown”.

Some say the story of the generosity of Cyrus was based on the stories of Hezekiah and Josiah. Yet no one knows anything about the domestic acts of these kings except what the bible tells us. The Deuteronomic history was written after *Ezra* and so the acts of the older kings were probably based on the acts of Artaxerxes, rather than the reverse. The objective of the history was to depict the Jews in the past as having been an apostate and ungrateful people who deserved God’s punishment because of their wickedness. This sort of propaganda suited the rulers, the Persians, rather than the Jews themselves, so their source ought to be evident.

## **The Book Restored**

C C Torrey has, in careful research, that few would question, convincingly restored the correct order of the original work as:

- ❑ *Ezra* 1. Edict of Cyrus; Sheshbazzar brings the temple treasure.
- ❑ *1 Esdras* 4:47-56; 62-5:6. Darius approves Zerubabel to return.
- ❑ *Ezra* 2:1-4:5. Zerubabel returns and begins the work opposed by adversaries.
- ❑ *Ezra* 5-6. A letter is sent to Darius and the decree of Cyrus found; the temple is built and dedicated on the 3rd of the twelfth month in the sixth year of Darius.
- ❑ *Ezra* 4:6. An objection is raised in the time of Xerxes.
- ❑ *Ezra* 7-8. In the 7th year of Artaxerxes, Ezra comes to Jerusalem with a letter of authority from the king and men gathered on route.
- ❑ *Nehemiah* 7:70-8. In the seventh month Ezra read the law and introduced the festival of booths.
- ❑ *Ezra* 9-10. Ezra stops mixed marriages.
- ❑ *Nehemiah* 9-10. Mixing ceases on the 24th; the author gives Ezra a long composed speech; a covenant is sealed by Nehemiah and others; separation is again confirmed and a pledge to give a third of a shekel followed by an added justification of it.
- ❑ *Ezra* 4:6-23. Adversaries demand a letter to Artaxerxes and he stops any further work on the walls until the time of Darius.
- ❑ *Nehemiah* 1-7:69. In the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, Nehemiah comes as governor and repairs the walls of Jerusalem against opposition; he implements social and economic reform.
- ❑ *Nehemiah* 11-13. Lists of people are followed by a retrospective look by Nehemiah at his second tour of duty during which the walls were dedicated, apparently in the reign of Darius II.

The reordering assumes that the correct sequence of Persian kings was known in the original, but had been forgotten by the time attempts were made to reconstruct it by the Jewish priests after the war, but the logic of the unfolding story also confirms this order. A confusion is apparent immediately and that is that there seem to be two Dariuses in the unfolding tale. Usually the references to Darius II are assumed to be anachronistic references to Darius I. In fact the Darius referred to could be Darius II.

Sara Japhet of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, notes in *Second Temple Studies II* that the Persian emperors are mentioned in *Ezra-Nehemiah*, as it stands, in close to the right order, allowing for three Dariuses and two Artaxerxes who are not distinguished. The Darius of *Ezra* 4:5 is Darius I, that of *Ezra* 4:24 is Darius II while that of *Nehemiah* 12:22 is Darius III. The Artaxerxes of *Ezra* 4:7ff is Artaxerxes I while that of *Ezra* 7:1 is Artaxerxes II. In *Ezra* 1-6, the order of kings is Cyrus, Darius, Ahasuerus (Xerxes), Artaxerxes, Darius, the latter being Darius II, and the story looks straightforward. This passage almost says it all:

And they built, and finished, according to the commandment of the God of Israel and according to the command of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes the king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

*Ezra* 6:14-15 Lit

Cyrus allows the temple to be rebuilt, some people return and begin (538 BC) but there is opposition and the work is interrupted for the reigns of Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes, until it is resumed in the second year of Darius II and completed in his sixth year (418 BC). It suggests that the chronology and therefore the order of

the books is correct.

Taking the order and chronology to continue true, the return of Ezra and Nehemiah are in the reign of Artaxerxes II, and the last king of Persia, Darius III is mentioned in *Nehemiah* 12:22. The greatest problem with such a simple and uncluttered scheme is that Nehemiah could hardly have been as late as the twentieth year of Artaxerxes II (384 BC) and fit in with the Elephantine papyri which are about thirty years earlier and already look to an established temple in Jerusalem.

The conventional idea that Nehemiah returned in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes I looks hard to refute but, to minimize arbitrary changes in order, would mean that Ezra returned in year seven of the same king. The whole reconstructed composition is curious in the way that it puts Ezra ahead of Nehemiah when the internal clues are that Ezra's reforms presuppose Nehemiah's:

- ❑ In *Ezra* 9:9, the walls of Jerusalem were already built, so Nehemiah went before Ezra to build them (or they must, as his story perhaps implies, have been knocked over again in the meantime).
- ❑ Jerusalem is derelict in *Nehemiah* (Neh 7:4; 11:1-2) but is healthily populated in *Ezra* (Ezra 10:1,13). (Had it been sacked again by Megabyxos or the Egyptians, or were the two restorers in the wrong order?)

We take the two men to be discussed in the wrong order, the Chronicler not knowing what the order was and choosing to put Ezra, the most important, because the most senior, first. The two facts noted that might explain the biblical order does not stop the reverse. Jerusalem might have been restored to some degree and populated in the time of Darius the Great, but was later sacked in the troubled time at the start of the reign of Artaxerxes. Other evidence for the reversal of the biblical order is given in the section on Ezra.

By taking Ezra to return in the seventh year of Darius specifically to inaugurate the city walls and the temple, and to deliver the law, the problems of chronology are minimized with only the assumption that an editor tried to correct what he thought was an error—that year seven of Darius (I) was impossible and it must have meant year seven of Artaxerxes, because Nehemiah and Ezra were contemporaries.

## Initial Considerations

Jeremiah (25:12; 29:10) said the exile would last seventy years—a lifetime—meaning that no one who returned would remember the country and its temple as it was. The exile would be longer than anyone could remember. No one could remember either, but that was because they had never been exiled in the first place—they were being deported to Yehud but the propaganda was they had no memory of being exiled initially because it was over a lifetime ago.

Cyrus had issued a general decree that people could return to their homes, but it was a cover for deporting colonists, just as the Assyrians and Babylonians had done. Cyrus was simply cleverer about it. There are few historians today, as opposed to theologians, who cannot see the declarations of Cyrus as propaganda. On the Babylonian cylinder seals Cyrus was the chosen king of Marduk, the Babylonian god. On the clay tablets of Nippur, Cyrus was the chosen king of the local god Sin. In the Jewish scriptures, Cyrus was the chosen king of the local god Yehouah. Cyrus proclaimed himself as the king chosen by the god of each nation. Curiously, ANET records that Cyrus ordered “as far as Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshunna, the towns Zamban, Me-Turnu,

Der as well as the regions of the Gutians, I... established for me permanent sanctuaries". Nothing is mentioned of a permanent sanctuary at Jerusalem.

The bible is clear that, despite any decree, no Jews did "return". Haggai and Zechariah highlight the failure of Jews to return, but their purpose will have been to justify the forcible colonization that was to follow. W K Lowther Clarke, in the *Concise Bible Commentary*, admits that few took advantage of Cyrus's edict, but the ones who did enforced their "policy on the apathetic 'people of the land.'" Racist? Since the "returners" were so few, these "apathetic" people must ultimately have provided the main body of the ancestry of modern Jews. As thick as two short planks, Lowther Clarke tells us:

There was no deliberate settlement of foreigners, as in North Israel after 721.

He has to say this because the integrity of the bible depends upon the ethnic group called in it the Israelites being continuous from Abraham to the time of Jesus. To admit that the people who "returned" were not the people who went rather spoils the picture.

In *Ezra* 8:36, "And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river, and they furthered the people, and the house of God". Ezra's orders are delivered to the "satraps and governors of Abarnahara", the correct translation. How many satraps were there in Yehud? The whole of Abarnahara was one satrapy. Perhaps this is a simple infelicity or an exaggeration to magnify Judah, but it gels better with Ezra being sent to inaugurate a temple for the whole of Abarnahara, not just to Judah itself.

The insertion from *1 Esdras* makes it clear that the Jerusalem temple was meant to be the temple of the whole of Abarnahara not just a small part of it—it really was the temple of the Hebrews, the population of Abarnahara, not merely the Jews. Syrians, Phœnicians and Canaanites had to help financially in building and maintaining the temple in its period of inception. The sums required were substantial—20 talents a year for building, 10 talents a year for sacrifices and unspecified support for the colonists is commanded, proving that they were privileged. The privileged class of people called Jews were divided into several castes whose duty was to mind the temple, and who had been given a small state of their own, rather akin to the Vatican. This province, Yehud, was obviously carved out of the Arab state of Idumaea (Edom) leading to a long lasting hatred between Jews and Idumaeans.

The myth is that they went up on the first day of the year in the second year of Darius (or Cyrus), presumably meaning that the new state was declared on that day, making the Persian New Year a famous day to remember in Jewish history.

*Ezra* 2:1-67 gives the list of 42,000 returned exiles, pretending that they all returned at once.

From the first day of the seventh month, the altar was consecrated, but nothing else seems to have been done and the foundation, supposedly laid by Sheshbazzar, had to be laid again. Sheshbazzar is unlikely to be Zerubabel unless it is a title or nickname, but both names are not Jewish but Persian. *1 Esdras* says the foundation was laid at the new moon of the second month of the second year of the new colony. This concern with lunar associations suggests that the colonists considered Yehouah as the god Sin. Some people were

weeping. It was not from joy but because they realized they were being enslaved (the Jews called themselves “the Captivity”) by a new ruling class with a different god from their own, even if it had the same name. Not surprisingly we hear immediately (*Ezra* 4:1-5) that hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans had begun.

## **Am ha Eretz**

*Ezra* 3:3 already spoke of fear of the “People of the Land”, the Am ha Eretz or Dallal ha Eretz (Poor of the Land), the people already living in the Palestinian hills when the colonists moved in under Persian protection to settle. At the inception of the temple, while some were rejoicing and some were weeping, we hear that there were “adversaries”.

Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel; Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.

These were the natives who, according to the supporting mythology, had been left behind when their rulers were taken captive. If so, the rulers no longer wanted anything to do with them. Though they had lamented in the ruined temple for seventy years, and now were supposed to have been weeping with joy, the returners ignored them because they were “adversaries”. These people were themselves deportees from the Assyrian period and knew it. The ruling Samaritans were deported from Bit Adini, the area around Harran in Syria, the Aramaean homeland, and, oddly, next to a small state called Yauda whose capital city seems to have been called Samal. Esarhaddon, the Syrian king had sent them to Israel from these small Aramaean states to worship the same god, Yehouah, as the colonists. They were utterly rejected:

Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.

Only the Yehudim, the people sent by the Persian kings as colonists had the right to build a temple and restore a religion, and it must have been to a particular and different specification from that already *in situ*. Had the “returners” been simply restoring the old temple, what possible objection could they have had against accepting the assistance offered by the native Yehouah worshippers? They could have had none. It is plain that the colonists were doing something that they knew would not be acceptable to the natives in any case, and so they refused assistance from the outset. Judaism was to be a new religion based on an ethical Yehouah of the Ahuramazda mould, not a fertility religion based on the mould of the Baalim of the natives.

The hostility between the Samaritans and the Jews began and never ceased. The story has it that the Samaritans were able to hold up the work for twenty years, but it seems most likely that Sheshbazzar could only make a formal beginning in the reign of Cyrus, and not enough colonists were sent until Zerubabel and Joshua came in the reign of Darius. The hostility of the natives obviously emerged when they were refused leave to help in the reconstruction, and that was when enough colonists had returned. Once there were enough colonists, protected by the Persian Satrap, the locals would have been unable to stop the work. Sabotage, however, was possible and the account suggests that measures had to be taken to prevent it.



## The Temple Treasure

The vast treasure returned also must be queried. It all supposedly happened as soon as Cyrus captured Babylonia. The problem is that unless the kings of Babylon meticulously kept captured treasure in depositories, how could it have been gathered together so easily to return it? Captured treasure, like that captured by the conquistadores in America, was put to use, to pay soldiers and to build new buildings. It was not just stored, it was melted down, spent and otherwise dispersed. How then was it still hanging about fifty or seventy years after Jerusalem had been razed by Nebuchadnezzar?

The book of Ezra tries to explain that it was kept in a temple called “The Temple of Babylon!” Yet Babylon had many temples and, if one was called the Temple of Babylon, it must have been to Marduk, the Babylonian god. Why should priests of Marduk want ritual objects that were meaningless to them? They would have had them recast as objects suitable for their own religion. Furthermore, the Palestine hill country was never so wealthy that any pre-Babylonian temple in Jerusalem would have had a vast treasure, whatever the bible might say about the mythical Solomon. These hills were impoverished.

The only answer, if *Ezra* is correct, is that Nebuchadnezzar set up a temple to Yehouah somewhere in Babylon. It must have been a Canaanite temple like the one in Elephantine in Egypt, but might have been a centre for worship of the Baal Yehouah of the deported Canaanites. Commonly conquerors would carry off idols, images of gods, and set them up elsewhere for superstitious reasons—they hoped to have the favour of the god. If Canaanite Yehouah had an image—a bull, one would guess—then that might have been carried off and used to set up a Yehouah cult elsewhere.

Had Yehouah already been a Babylonian cult, even if not a major one, then it would explain the Jewish names in the accounts of the Babylonian king of Murushu. It is falsely assumed that the Jews were taken into captivity to the city of Babylon. There they flourished and that explains the presence of Jewish names on Babylonian tablets. A few thousand deportees, or myriads, could hardly have had much impact from a condition of slavery in less than three generations.

The deduction is based on Semitic names incorporating “Yahu” or “lah”, and “El”, considered to have been Israelite names for God. And so they were—but not only Israelites worshipped these gods. People other than those in the geographic place worshipped these gods, and, if it is maintained that any worshipper of El is an Israelite and any worshipper of Yehouah is a Jew, then it has to be recognized that Israelites and Jews always lived in places other than in Israel and Judah, and the manner in which they worshipped must have been different in these different places.

Yehouah and El were Canaanite gods not just Jewish and Israelite ones. Indeed, El was also worshipped for centuries in Mesopotamia. Added to that was the deportation of the Israelites by the Assyrians, and they must have had names in “lah” and “El”. If they were allowed to keep their names then they would have been passed on, at least grandfather to grandson, a common preference in those times, presumably so that fathers and sons could not be confused. It seems the Persians decided to rationalize religions in an acceptable way, by unifying diverse gods under a Mazda-like cloak as the God of Heaven. Iranians called those who followed these non-Zoroastrian religions Juddin.

When the Persians had decided to set up a Jewish colony in Jerusalem supported financially by the Hebrews of Abarnahara, they might indeed have taken some cult objects from a temple of Yehouah in Babylon to Jerusalem, but the image of a bull would not have been one of them, even though Persians revered bulls. They used no images themselves for their High God, Ahuramazda, other than a winged disc, and this is the most likely image used in the temple of Yehouah. The rest of the ritual paraphernalia mentioned, where it is not exaggerated for propaganda purposes, was donated out of the Persian treasury. The king aimed to get the money back with interest once the colony and its temple had been established.

## **A Letter to Darius**

The report continues at *Ezra* 5:1, the Aramaic section having been wrongly inserted. The official mentioned is Tatnai (Tattenai, Tatannu), Satrap of Abarnahara, a man with an Assyrian name, and his sub-official has a Persian name. A T Olmstead reports, “Ta-at-t[an-ni] (Tattenai) governor (pahat) of Ebirnari (Abarnahara, in Persian times)” appears in a Babylonian document of 502 BC. Abarnahara was what was essentially to become the empire of David in mythology. It covered Cyprus, Phoenicia, Syria, Palestine and West Arabia, the places whose treasurers had to support the new temple.

The Samaritans evidently complained to the governor and the Satrap about what was going on. The start of the reign of Darius was troubled and possibly the Satrap thought they had a point. Cyrus had issued his policy on thousands of cylinder seals and it is inconceivable that Tatnai did not know imperial policy, so that was not the issue. But he might have thought it a good idea to humour the Samaritans for awhile, pretending to be sympathetic then coming back with the message that it was out of his hands. Persians were generally rather subtle rulers, a fact that is usually ignored. The search for the decree by Darius I looks unlikely and might have been the Satrap’s propaganda to allow the Samaritans to save face.

Some complaint of the Canaanites presumably against the colonists was made in the time of Xerxes (Ahasuerus) but only a fragment remained for the editor and he could add nothing, so it appears alone in 4:6 testifying only to the fragmentary nature of much of the bible, and showing that it is a valient attempt at reconstruction. It also suggests that when long, more or less complete, stories appear like the sagas of Joseph, the Exodus, David and Solomon, they are late romances added to the fragments salvaged from the destruction of the civil war, and therefore inventions so late that they precede the time of Jesus by only about a century, not the millennium or two that biblicists think.

## **Ezra**

Now Ezra appears on the scene—or did he? The seventh year of Artaxerxes I would have been 458 BC whereas the seventh year of Artaxerxes II was 397 BC. The editor does not know the sequence of Persian kings and makes no effort to distinguish one Artaxerxes from another, but seems to think Artaxerxes preceded Xerxes, who has little role in this story. Ezra was a contemporary of Johanan (*Ezra* 10:6) and Nehemiah was a contemporary of Eliashub (*Neh* 3:1) but Johanan was the son of Eliashub, so Ezra seems to have been a much younger man than Nehemiah and might have appeared a generation later in the reign of Artaxerxes II. What is more, the list of High Priests (*Neh* 11 and 22) shows that Johanan or Jonathan was actually a grandson of Eliashub, and the Elephantine papyri show he was High Priest in 408 BC. Ezra seems to have “returned” much

later than Nehemiah. Note that he is not listed as a leader of the “returners” in *Ezra* 2:2 or 7:7.

Ezra is always considered to be a Jewish High Priest and concerned only with Jewish matters (though he is never called a High Priest or listed among them in the genealogies). David Janzen, in *JBL* (2000), goes all around the mountains to return to the point of departure. Ezra was a priest and scribe who served as administrative head of the temple community. The letter of Artaxerxes is spurious, merely a midrash which it is unhelpful to bother trying to understand, and Ezra’s work is simply as administrator, priest, and scribe working within the framework of the temple assembly in Yehud. Ezra functions simply as a temple official, albeit on a number of levels, and had no mission. The Ezra narrative admittedly seems to contradict itself:

- ☐ while Ezra is not a high priest, he appears to act like one,
- ☐ while he is not a satrap, he appears to wield satrap-like powers,
- ☐ while he is sent to enforce the law in Yehud, it is the community that actually appears to exercise legal authority,
- ☐ while he comes to restore the cult, supposedly it has long been functioning

His position was a peculiar one. But it will not do that Ezra was just a temple official! Artaxerxes informs Ezra that the royal treasuries are obligated to provide resources to the temple in Jerusalem and that they are not to tax the temple clergy (7:20–24). He also authorizes Ezra to appoint judicial officials throughout Abarnahara, the satrapy of which the province of Yehud was a part, and to teach the law of God there (7:25–26).

Joseph Blenkinsopp in his 1987 *JBL* paper argued that the biblical descriptions of the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah made sense because the actions that they took were not dissimilar from those of the Egyptian, Udjahorresnet. The inscription on his funerary statue says Udjahorresnet defected to the Persians when they invaded Egypt in 525 BC, became a local advisor to Cambyses, informing him of Egyptian customs and religion, and thereby won the king’s approval to restore the cult at Sais, expel foreigners from the temple, eliminate ritual impurities, and reestablish ritual observances.

Many scholars have found it significant that in the letter and elsewhere in the Ezra narrative, Ezra is called a “scribe” as well as a “priest”. The word scribe was used in two basic senses in the Persian period:

1. someone who has the ability to read and write and who is called upon to transcribe legal documents;
2. officials within the administration.

We use the word “secretary” in equivalent ways, as someone who transcribes letters and as a senior government official like a Secretary of State. Legal documents or letters from Persian officials mention the name of the scribe who wrote out the letter. An order from Arsames to his officials in Egypt states that “Nabuaqab wrote”, and that “Nabuaqab is the scribe”. In the same letter, Arsames writes that “Anani the scribe is chancellor” and since Anani is not the scribe who committed Arsames’ words to paper, here “scribe” means “chancellor”, the “overseer of the order”. Anani will see that the order is carried out.

This double description of someone as “scribe” and “chancellor” is known elsewhere from the Persian period. A cuneiform document from 486 BC. concerns an order given by a satrap to two men regarding a certain amount of barley, and both men are referred to as “sepiru” (“scribe”) and as “bel temi” (“chancellor”). These titles appear

in the introduction to the letter of *Ezra* 4:11–16, part of the correspondence between “Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe” (4:8) and Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes orders that the building of Jerusalem come to a halt, and that Rehum and Shimshai enact the royal decree in Yehud. A cuneiform text also refers to “a scribe of the satrap of Egypt”, who worked at the royal court and who kept the satrap informed of what was going on there.

So, a scribe was an official position within the Persian administration, and the “Scribe of the God of Heaven” was an office of the Persian government. Scholars who accept the validity of Ezra’s mission look to the title of scribe to explain his position *vis-à-vis* the royal administration. Did scribes do the types of things Ezra was commissioned to do according to the letter—teach the people about the law and appoint legal officials? If scribes represented higher ranks in their absence, then Ezra could have received a commission from the shah to introduce Jewish law to Abarnahara and to appoint judicial officials who would act in accordance with it.

H H Schaefer has concluded that Ezra was a High Commissioner for Jewish Affairs but it is difficult to understand why an officer responsible for Jewish affairs should have been needed at the Persian court. To suggest that a tiny colony should require its own minister of religion in the chancellery is absurd. However, if Jewish here pertains not to Yehudim but to “Juddin”, the Persian description of non-Zoroastrian religions, the title and position would make complete sense.

It seems Ezra was a senior minister responsible for religious affairs in the empire, and this can only add to the suspicion that Ezra is an abbreviation of Zoroaster. Zoroaster was a title of officials of the Zoroastrian religion at Rhages under the Medes and doubtless remained the same under the Persians, though officiating at the new capital. What could have brought such a senior religious authority, a man senior to the satrap, to Yehud?

Josephus tells us that it was that Johanan had murdered his own brother in the temple! If the colonists had been given the task of setting up an official religion—a religion of the Good Creation—then this was a serious matter. More so in reality because it will surely have been a symbol of the dissension between the Samaritans and the Jews. The governor of Yehud, Bagoas (Bagoses, in the Elephantine papyri) had reported the murder to the Satrap of Abarnahara, and thence it reached the office of the minister of religious affairs at the king’s court. Ezra sought the permission of the king to go and sort it out in person:

Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand.

*Ezra* 7:14

Artaxerxes II came to the throne in 404 BC. From the dated letters of Elephantine, Bagoas was governor of Yehud in 410 and 407 BC. Egypt declared itself autonomous about this time, and remained semi-independent for sixty years, so suddenly Yehud became an important place as an outpost once more. In these conditions of uncertainty and change, Johanan seems to have decided to get rid of his troublesome brother. The fact that the satrap did not punish the High Priest suggests that Joshua was considered a trouble by the Persians. Instead sacrifices were taxed implying a more widespread dissension in the worshipping population and Ezra, the senior minister for religious affairs, was sent to sort it all out.

## **The Artaxerxes Letter**

In 1944, Arvid Kapelrud stated, that “the rescript [of Artaxerxes] in its entire spirit and tone is Jewish and not Persian is agreed to by all”. It is not agreed today! Most English scholars accept it genuine as did Kellerman and Noth. The Jewishness of it might be the work of the editor casting it into a more understandable form, or an editor having to reconstruct a lost or largely damaged letter at a later time. There is not even any need to think that Artaxerxes wrote it. His chancellery officials will have done that and the king merely signed it. The officials might have couched the letter in suitable terms and shown familiarity with the procedures. The mention of the wrath of the Judaeen god might have originally meant Ahuramazda, or been diplomatic or the addition of a Jewish editor.

H G M Williamson argues the letter’s use of Imperial Aramaic, its Persian loanwords, and the general agreement of its contents with known Achaemenid policy toward foreign peoples support its authenticity. Sara Japhet and Williamson have damaged the older scholarly consensus that the Chronicler was responsible for Ezra-Nehemiah, and particularly for the Ezra narrative. Williamson admits that the narrative has undergone editing, but its basis is a report that Ezra sent to the Persian court to describe his activity in Jerusalem.

Because most scholars accept the letter of Artaxerxes as authentic, they view Ezra’s work as a “mission”, actions given validation by a royal decree. From this point of view Artaxerxes sent Ezra to Yehud, to reform the temple cult. Artaxerxes may have been concerned about the stability of a region close to Egypt, an unstable and rebellious satrapy, and may have wanted Ezra to impose order in Yehud. By working for social cohesion in Jerusalem and Yehud, Ezra ensured that the province remained docile and accommodating to Persian rule.

Ezra’s journey might have been Artaxerxes’ idea and there was no original request on the part of the Judaeen. It was a standard Persian courtesy to quote relevant bits of any original letter. Here there is no such citation but the letter writer has detailed knowledge of aspects of the Jerusalem cultus. The Palestinian vocabulary in the letter would be understandable if the letter’s author were quoting an original appeal from Judaeans. If there was an original letter, then it has been modified. Perhaps a request was sent to Artaxerxes from the Jewish community and the monarch composed a letter granting the petition that quoted the original piece of correspondence in the manner in which we would expect. Later on, this letter was edited in such a way that the original petition was incorporated, and the whole inserted into its present position in the Ezra narrative.

The letter seems to quote an earlier bit of correspondence, albeit not one from Ezra or his colleagues. In 7:21–24, Artaxerxes apparently quotes a letter that he has sent to his treasurers, informing them that they are to supply the Jerusalem temple with provisions. Otherwise there is no reference back to an earlier letter or request. Every known piece of administrative correspondence sent in reply to an earlier query quotes from it. Their absence here makes Ezra’s journey and all of the letter’s particular references to the cult in Jerusalem entirely the initiative of Artaxerxes.

Even if the letter is edited, does 7:12–26 contain what actually happened? Was Ezra originally commissioned by the Persian king to conduct vessels and money to Jerusalem (7:15–16)? Was he really given the authority to appoint officials in Abarnahara to adjudicate on the basis of “the law of your God and the law of the king” (7:25)? Did the king really instruct his treasurers to supply the Jerusalem temple with provisions (7:21–23)? Did he really order them to exempt the temple clergy from taxes (7:24)?

The letter as we have it makes Ezra’s journey to Jerusalem and the gifts to the temple there from the royal court

appear not as Ezra's initial suggestion to the king but simply as unprompted royal beneficence. A reader of *Ezra-Nehemiah* may be meant to assume that this continues the book's equation of the royal and divine wills. The decree of Artaxerxes in *Ezra* addresses two main issues:

1. the donation of money and goods from the crown and other sources to the Jerusalem cult (7:15–24),
2. Ezra's own appointment as some sort of official whom the king has assigned "to seek out concerning Yehud and Jerusalem by the law of your God" (7:14, 25–26).

Ezra had authority over all the Jews of Abarnahara, to judge with severe penalties including death. He had authority therefore over the satrap himself in these matters. It seems that after a hundred years the different colonists had not yet settled the new religion on the region. Ezra was provided with apparently huge resources (though doubtless exaggerated as propaganda) to settle it for good.

Ezra is portrayed as more than just a royal lackey. He is portrayed as a trusted servant of the king. Sara Japhet thinks the editor of *Ezra* 1–6 indeed equated the will of the Persian king with the will of God. *Ezra* 7:27–28 has the same attitude. Ezra is told at the beginning of the letter that an order has gone out that he is "to inquire about Yehud and Jerusalem with the law of your God that is in your hand" (7:14). *Ezra* 7:15–24 then discusses financial issues, and the thread of Ezra's inquiry resumes in the last two verses of the letter. He is to appoint judges and magistrates "who are to adjudicate for all the people who are in Abarnahara, for all who know the laws of your God; and whoever does not know (them) you will teach". The letter says that Ezra is to appoint these officials "for all the people who are in Abarnahara" (7:25). All the people in Abarnahara were to be subject to the law of the God of heaven. Finally, the letter concludes, "all who do not do the law of your God and the law of the king" will be subject to punishment. The Persian shahanshah in practice was God. That is why the shah wanted to apply the law of Ezra's God to all of Abarnahara.

The appointing of legal officials in Abarnahara and teaching the law were the duties Ezra had, but the rest of the *Ezra* narrative records Ezra performing only the latter action. Appointment of officials of the law of God in other nations of Abarnahara can have been of no interest to the later Jewish editors, and have been omitted. Ezra teaches the law to the Jewish community in *Nehemiah* 8. The letter gives Ezra sweeping powers to enforce the law, but the community volunteers their infraction in the case of the divorce of the foreign women in *Ezra* 9–10, even though Ezra then acts strongly. There is no doubt of Ezra's huge authority, but he exerts it through diplomacy and moral pressure.

Was the Persian government in the habit of sending out representatives to establish and codify local and royal law codes? Blenkinsopp claims that Ezra was sent by Artaxerxes I in 458 because Artaxerxes, like Darius, was intent on reorganizing his empire and instituting legal reforms. Janzen says there are two major difficulties with the parallel between Udjhorresnet and Ezra that Blenkinsopp attempts to draw:

1. there is no good indication that Udjhorresnet carried out any legal reforms in Egypt by means of royal fiat;
2. there is no indication that Artaxerxes I initiated any sweeping legal reforms within his empire as Blenkinsopp claims.

If Artaxerxes had actually begun such reforms, they would be the historical background for Ezra's work. This



objection needs revising if the emperor were Darius II, not Artaxerxes. Darius was half Babylonian and made significant changes in emphasizing Babylonian culture.

Ezra set off, again on the first day of the year, and arrived four months later exactly. Ezra picks up a fresh batch of colonists, evidently priests but not Levites at Casiphia by the river Ahava. There were no Levites because the caste of Levites only arose after the Persians had set up the temple. An editor thought the absence of any reference to Levites strange and has added an explanation. The confusion is like that of much of the scriptures—multiple redaction—anachronistic mentions of Levites have later been added.

Casiphia must be Ctesiphon and the river must be the Euphrates, or a nearby tributary. Who were these priests that were not Levites, and therefore apparently unsuitable? Yet others called Nethinim were found and were considered suitable. These Nethinim served the role for Ezra of priests and were admitted into the priestly caste being allowed to marry with them. It looks very much as though Ezra is using his authority to create a class of reliable people whom he would use to impose order on to the unreliable earlier colonists of Yehud.

## **Financial Matters!**

The Persians were less generous than the Neo-Babylonian kings in financial policy toward temples. The Persians incorporated some of the established temples into the government-regulated system of land tenure. At Ur, the vast temple lands and holdings belonging to the god Sin were overseen by the same government officials who administered government land and waterways.

Some texts refer to the temple lands both as belonging to Sin and as “bow land”, a kind of fief distributed by the crown to vassals who were obligated to perform military service and pay taxes in exchange for the land. Other texts note that holders of temple land are charged the same kind of tax that was paid to the crown on the royal fiefs. So, some of the temples were integrated into the network of tax-gathering organizations. The temples were also obliged to make payments for public works.

In Egypt, Cambyses put an end to the royal donation of provisions to the temples there, allowing only three to continue to receive produce from the government, and even in those cases he drastically cut their income from the crown. Yet the Persians were also well aware of the importance of courting regional religious sensibilities to keep the peace in their vast empire.

Cambyses agreed to Udjahorresnet’s proposal and restored the cult, priests, and festivals of the temple of Neith at Sais, according to Blenkinsopp. Udjahorresnet also says that Cambyses came to Sais to prostrate himself before the goddess. In fact, one of Cambyses’ seals from Egypt was designed in traditional Egyptian style and claimed that he was the “beloved of Wadjet”, the goddess. In Egyptian reliefs he is pictured in local dress, kneeling before the gods.

The *Babylonian Chronicles* also suggest that Cambyses worshipped before Marduk at Esagil. Diodorus claims that because of Darius’s close association with the priests of Egypt and his study of their theology, he was addressed as a god by the Egyptians during his lifetime. There is political sense in a king presenting himself as a devotee of a god or goddess of a conquered region, since such actions are likely to garner support for the empire or at least reduce local animosity toward the ruling power.

The Persians would also cut off royal donations to temples and increase their payments to the administrative coffers, but a king could have authorized a donation to a particular cult, as we find in Artaxerxes' letter in 7:15, 21–23. Udjahorresnet reports that Darius restored the various temple guilds at Sais, and “had commanded to give them every good thing”, presumably a royal donation to re-establish what had been destroyed in the earlier revolts in Egypt against Persian power. Artaxerxes evidently made a similar contribution to Jerusalem as a gesture of goodwill.

The list of provisions in 7:22 donated to the temple is presented just as Persian lists of the period were presented. The item is listed, then the unit of measurement, then the number of units to be provided. Provisions are listed in this way in a letter from Arsames regarding rations to be given to one of his officials travelling from Babylon to Egypt, as well as many ostraca from southern Palestine regarding items from royal stores. Artaxerxes' claim to his treasurers in 7:23 that he wishes through these donations to avoid the wrath of the God of Heaven, though always assumed to be the Judaeian god, could have meant his own God Ahuramazda who wore the heavens as his “massy cloke”.

As for the text's claim that the king authorized his treasurers not to tax the clergy of the temple (7:24), a parallel exists in the Gadatas letter, a Greek inscription from the second century AD that presents itself as a copy of a letter sent from Darius to an official by the name of Gadatas in the Ionian province of Magnesia. In it, Darius warns Gadatas to cease taxing the sacred gardeners of Apollo. This is the only document besides the Artaxerxes letter of Ezra that witnesses to a Persian-period clergy with a tax-exempt status, and, as with the letter in Ezra, the authenticity and historical reliability of the Gadatas letter are disputed. Some think it was an opportunistic late forgery but J Wiesehöfer (1987) thinks the author has enough knowledge of administrative practices of the Persian period. The inscription also introduces matters that have nothing to do with the cult at Magnesia, an unlikely dilution if the inscription was composed long after the Persian period merely to support the clergy's wish for tax-free status.

When a new temple was established in the Persian province of Lycia in the fourth century BC, the priest received immunity from local taxes but not from those of the central Persian authority. The establishment of this cult is recorded on a trilingual stele. The Greek and Lycian versions on the stele end with an appeal for the satrap to recognize this new cult, while the Aramaic ends with the Persian satrap's response. Whereas the Greek has “May Pixodoros establish (the cult) as lawful”, the Aramaic version ends with “He [Pixodoros] wrote this law for enforcement”. The three versions, but especially the Greek and Aramaic, parallel each other so closely that A Dupont-Sommer seems correct that the Greek and Lycian were the original appeal to the Persian authorities for the establishment of the cult, and the Aramaic version was the positive response to the appeal from Pixodoros. The Aramaic has quoted the Greek verbatim, just as the Persians habitually did. The Greek version states that the cities establishing the cult “gave to them [the priests] immunity [of taxes] of goods”. Yet the Aramaic, which follows the Greek so scrupulously, omits this issue entirely. The satrap did not want the clergy to believe that the Persian government would also abrogate taxation as the cities had. This stele cannot be used to argue that the Persians exempted priests from taxes.

The biblical account continues at *Nehemiah* 7:70, where large amounts of money were collected from people as offerings. Gilbert J P McEwan, (*Priest and Temple in Hellenistic Babylon* 1981) shows that in Babylonia, the larger temples at least were involved in tax collection and government land ownership. Large temples owned

large amounts of land and other holdings that they would rent out. The Eanna shrine at Uruk owned 150 storage facilities, large plots of land and farms. The temple had a governing board that would oversee the holdings. It received rent, tithes, and offerings as income and paid out salaries through its various prebends, which included members of the priesthood but also many different groups of artisans. Lower levels of temple personnel simply received rations. All temple holdings were considered to be the property of the god, and so temple property at Uruk was called “the property of Anu”.

While some of the land remained under direct control of the temple administration, other parts were leased out. The prebendary rights were as much temple property as the land and so were the temple slaves. Administrative policy concerning temple function, personnel, fines, assigning vacant temple land, and so on was made by the “puhru” as a whole, which was presided over by the chief administrative officer, the “shatammu”. The assembly included the cultic professionals among its members, and membership within the assembly qualified one for membership in the city. The assembly would even consider such matters as marriages, petitions, and grievance. At Uruk, the prebendary system was controlled by the “bit abim” (“clans”). All the higher civil and temple officials were members of one of the temple clans, and assembly membership was likely restricted to those who were clan members, although it is possible that the clan system was not introduced until the Hellenistic period.

Throughout the Persian period, established Babylonian temples existed not just as cult centers but “as social units with dependent populations and extensive administrative staffs, as economic units with widespread real property, diverse sources of income and facilities for accumulating and redistributing their wealth”, according to M Stolper. In this social setting the “shatammu” as chief administrator of the temple did not act by himself but always within the context of the head of the assembly. It is all remarkably Jewish.

In Neo-Babylonian texts from the Ebabbar shrine at Sippar, the temple administrator appears in connection with the questioning of assembly members involved in lawsuits, and in some texts appears even with royal judges. At Sippar he was involved not only with managing matters such as land, cattle, and temple personnel, but also acted as judge in a few cases dealing strictly with matters internal to the temple assembly. As an administrator, then, a “shatammu” could not force an assembly to act but could only lead it as it made its decisions. Insofar as such an administrator could apparently act as a judge, his authority was limited to matters within the world of the assembly.

Scribes appear within the Babylonian temple assemblies, both the “sepiru”, the Aramaic scribe who wrote on parchment, and the “tupsharru”, the cuneiform scribe who wrote on clay. The “tupsharru” was considered a priest, while the “sepiru” was considered an administrator. So beyond referring to members of the Persian bureaucracy, the term “scribe” could also refer to functionaries within the temple organizations, and in Babylon to people who were considered both priests and administrators. Janzen tries to maintain that Ezra was simply a temple scribe, a “tupsharru”, but that is untenable unless Ezra-Nehemiah is abandoned as a pointless work. The actions that Ezra performs in the Ezra narrative have contemporary parallels. Joel Weinberg has given convincing parallels between the Jerusalem temple community and those of Babylonia, between the Babylonian “puhru” and the “qahal” of Ezra-Nehemiah. Both terms refer to a temple assembly, and the “qahal” of Persian-period Yehud appears to have functioned much like its Babylonian counterpart. The Jerusalem temple assembly was structured by the clans that were the equivalent of the Babylonian “bit abim”.

Ezra acts like a “shatammu”, an administrator who can guide the assembly but who cannot mandate decisions,

yet the Artaxerxes letter gave him that authority. Janzen thinks Ezra was just the head of the assembly and declares the letter spurious denying that Ezra had the authority to legislate a decision in the way that Nehemiah did. In *Nehemiah* 5, the poor complain about the burden of taxes, and the governor handles it. This, though, was a matter beyond the bounds of the assembly. Ezra was not sent to replace the governor, although as a more senior official, he had more power. The governor still acted as governor, and had to shift the attention away from the royal taxes that had caused the problem.

Janzen says Nehemiah can act in a way that Ezra cannot, an obviously unwarranted assumption that he has to deny the shah's letter to uphold. Janzen goes on to say that Ezra had no power to act outside of the assembly, because he did not use it, but a senior statesman and diplomat would have sought to lead rather than drive, especially in delicate matters, and especially because that was how the leading priests, the "shatammu", in fact, behaved. When, in *Ezra* 9–10, he works within the assembly on a matter wholly internal to it, he works as "shatammu", not as royal official because it is more effective, but there is no doubt in the whole work that the assembly knew who had the power. Ezra's authority shines through.

## Reading the Law

A most important passage follows in *Nehemiah* 8 where Ezra reads the law to people who already putatively had the most comprehensive law since Hammurabi—the law of Moses. They are supposed to have had it for a thousand years, and the Second Law, or *Deuteronomy*, they are supposed to have had for about 200 years. "They had forgotten them!" the "scholars" of the Jewish and Christian persuasions tell us. S Mowinckel (1965) lists the hypotheses and their proponents about "The Book of the Law of Moses" which Ezra read (*Neh* 8:2-15):

1. Deuteronomic Laws—Laurence Browne, Raymond Bowman, M F Scott, Ulrich Kellermann;
2. A collection of legal materials—Rudolph Kittel, Gerhard von Rad, Martin Noth;
3. The Priestly Code—Abraham Kuenen, Bernhard Stade, W H Koster, Eduard Meyer, W O E Oesterly, Adolphe Lods, Hans-J Kraus;
4. *The Pentateuch*—Julius Wellhausen, Ernest Sellin, Hans Schaeder, Otto Eissfeldt, Wilhelm Rudolph, Kurt Galling, Sigmund Mowinckel, William F Albright, John Bright, Frank Cross and James Sanders, but C Houtman objects that legal citations in *Ezra-Nehemiah* do not come from the *Pentateuch*, nor are supposed Pentateuchal citations quoted verbatim.

Only the first or second can be right. The Priestly Code has to be much later, being the elaborate rules of a well established sacerdotal centre. Ezra leads the group of Levites in teaching the law, obviously working in a senior capacity. Here he is called both "priest" and "scribe". In fact, Ezra reads to the colonists and the Am ha Eretz a covenant, an enforceable treaty in the form of a statute like the one the biblicists tell us they had had since the time of Josiah. The law read out by Ezra was a law that had to be kept. Ezra imposed it firmly under threat, and the people wept! Some say they wept in joy but they were commanded not to mourn! David A Smith, in the *Lutterworth Dictionary of the Bible* concedes that the response was grief, but it soon turned to joy! It was the law of Mazas, Ahuramazda, called Mazas by the Assyrians, Moses by the Jews, or perhaps Misa, the name of Mithras in the Persian dialect. Jewish sages have thought of Ezra as the second Moses. He was the first Moses, unless Ahuramazda or Mithras is considered the first. It also begins to look like more than a coincidence that his brother is Aaron, in Hebrew letter equivalents, Ahrwn. Besides the final "nun" the word looks to be a mishearing of Ahura (Aura), and the "nun" is easily explained from its assimilation into Hebrew as meaning "his

brother”.

Ezra read out *Deuteronomy*! *Deuteronomy*, charges the priests (*Dt* 17:18 and 31:9–13) with a public reading of the law to Israel. Ezra teaches Torah to the community, acting the way a priest would. The name *Deuteronomy* does not imply that some law went before it except in the minds of scholars who cannot think. *Deuteronomy* is a name given to a biblical book by Christians because they thought there already was a first law—the law of Moses. The truth is that *Deuteronomy* was the law until the priests of a later date, when the temple was up and running, wanted to add as many layers of sacrificing, tithing and taxing as they could to extract the maximum revenue from the population. John How is sure Ezra’s law is *Deuteronomy*. The parts reminiscent of the Priestly Code (*Neh* 10:38-39; 12:47) were additions by the Chroniclers—priests.

The form of the law is exactly the form of ancient near eastern treaties. Christians want us to believe that God chose a legal form for his covenant with the people that the Semites of the fertile crescent knew well. If this pathetic lunacy were not so ingrained and prevalent among biblical scholars it would be risable. Indeed it is, but there is no historian who has the nerve to tell the religious dogmatists to do something useful like sweeping roads or digging out cesspits, leaving scholarship to professionals who do not need to call upon the hypothesis of God’s finger at every juncture in Palestinian history.

David C Deuel calls Ezra “an Old Testament pattern for expository preaching”, when he means that Ezra is *the* Old Testament pattern of expository teaching.

If Judaism followed the pattern established by Ezra and if the church took many of its first practices from Judaism, is it possible that expository preaching has enjoyed an unbroken succession of “pulpiteers” from this early period?

Need he ask. He points out that Larsen had already said:

Preachers today stand in this awesome succession. We are the descendants of those incendiary spokesmen for God in all their variety and diversity.

David L Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching* (1989)

The shape of the ceremony when it was read out became the traditional shape of Jewish and Christian services which centre on readings from the legally binding books and an exhortation to obey. Psalms and suitable prayers reinforced the message: “Obey the law and you are saved. Do not obey and you are doomed”.

The people could not understand what was being said, though Ezra was a Jew reading out the law of Moses, we are assured. A large number of assistants were needed to “interpret” Ezra’s words for the crowd and to explain precisely what they meant—the “sense”. Biblicists know that *Ezra* 4:18 refers to “translation” not to “explanation”, and sometimes they will admit it in a footnote while going on then to treat the meaning as explanation. “Translation” here means “interpretation” or “explanation”, they say. It means “translation” because Ezra is a Persian and he is reading in Persian. His assistants translate the Persian words and explain them to the assembled throng.

In the ritual the people call out, “Amen, Amen!” This now means “quite so” or “truly”, repeated twice, as Jesus

did in John's gospel, but oddly enough Artaxerxes was called "The Mindful", in Greek, Mnemon, so the people are actually calling out Artaxerxes's name in Greek! Whether this is a bizarre coincidence or whether for some reason Ezra was reading the law in Greek, inviting the crowd to respond by repeating the Shahanshah's name in Greek, will never be known. It seems doubtful, except that the same law might already have been used in the Greek colonies in Asia, so Ezra had it to hand in a readily usable form—but in Greek! In any event, the calling out of "Amen" to acknowledge a religious statement has never ceased since, in Judaism and Christianity.

## The Festival of Booths

Ezra in the passage next entered has the colonists celebrating the festival of Booths. The Chronicler tells us that the Jews had not been celebrating the Feast of Booths since the time of Joshua. For you scholars at the back there, this means it had *never* been celebrated. It was supposed to have commemorated the time God spent with the Israelites in their tents in the desert. They had to have settled down for it to make sense, so it could only have been celebrated in the time of Judges, according to biblical chronology. It would not occur to a Christian or Jew that the Chronicler is actually leaving clues to take the rise out of the gullible believers. These people in reality had never spent any time in the desert in booths, so what was the point? The people who had lived in booths in the desert, or Eurasian steppes, were Iranians.

Zoroastrians had a harvest festival in the autumn dedicated to Mithras, and we have to conclude that Ezra was really introducing a festival to match that of Mithras. Booths is held from 15 to 22 of Tishri which corresponds to the end of September and beginning of October (sometime in the interval 20 September to 19 October) in our calendar. Mithras became the Jewish archangel Michael, and Michaelmas Day is still, to this day, 29 September in the Christian calendar. Also significant is that Booths required the sacrifice of seventy bulls over the whole period of the festival, and Mithras is associated with bull sacrifice.

A bundle of twigs called the "Four Species" are ritually waved throughout this festival, a habit that has no scriptural explanation except that the booths were to be made of twigs:

Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths. (Neh 8:15)

Zoroastrian priests always carried a bundle of twigs called the "Baresman", and we can deduce that the "Four Species" being waved are a memory of the Zoroastrian origins of the ceremony of booths.

The purpose of the festival for Ezra was that the new law had to be ceremonially taught for a week every year. But the original period of the ceremony did not match that adopted later—it was not set on the fifteenth day of the month as it now is. This first one was held on the second day of the seventh month. It shows that the traditional date set in the Mosaic law did not precede this law of Ezra. Ezra, in short, was founding the tradition, and later it was moved by the priests to make way for the Day of Atonement that was commemorated on 10 Tishri (Lev 23:26-32).

The Chronicler mentions the Festival of Booths elsewhere in his long history (2 Chr 5:3; 7:8; Ezra 3:4) but these simply show that the editor called the Chronicler was writing at a later period, when the feast had become traditional, and it had been customary to retroject it into the past, much of which was a mythical justification for



the priestly extortions. A Guillaume explains to us, in a commentary on *Chronicles*:

The doctors of Islam shaped the laws of millions of Moslems by reading back into the origins of their religion the conditions and ideas of their own age: how customs and laws introduced by Mohammed became *de rigueur* by the simple expedient of claiming for them his precept or example.

It is remarkable that Christians like Guillaume could write this without a hint that they had noticed the same could have happened in Christianity and Judaism. Guillaume wrote in about 1920, but there is little evidence that many Christian scholars, or anyone with influence, have noticed it until this day. To make it utterly clear—the whole bible is built on the same principle. Guillaume might have been a genuine Christian *idiot savant* because he asks in wonder or deceit:

Why was it that Israel's great saints had lived as though the law had never been given?

Despite what he said about the Moslems, it never seemed to occur to him that much Jewish scripture is fabricated at a much later date and retrojected into the past. Later laws concocted by the priesthood not more than about 200 years BC are retrojected into a distant antiquity to give them a caché that they could never otherwise have had. They invented a character to explain why their law was called the law of Moses, a name that they came not to understand because their god was called Yehouah not Moses.

This part of Nehemiah shows the foundation of the feast of Booths and indeed of the central elements of Judaism, in the time of Ezra. No one can seriously believe that the native people had forgotten these traditions from their inception until the time of Ezra, or that an official of the Persian king should turn up with records of a detailed law that the people for whom it was intended had forgotten for a long time. Ezra instituted the feast and the readings of the law that became the basis of our modern patriarchal religions.

### **Separating Husband from Wife**

Now we come to Ezra's most offensive act, the case of the foreign women in Ezra 9–10, when the members of the assembly brought the matter of intermarriage to Ezra. Ezra deplores the situation, claiming that it will provoke God to anger and cause God to destroy the community, but it is the assembly or part of it that confesses the "sin". Shecaniah, not Ezra, suggests that the assembly cause those of its members who have married foreign women to divorce them (10:2–4).

Ezra made the whole of Israel swear to do as he wanted, and obliged the Jewish men to divorce their wives and cast off them and their children, or have all their property and rights removed. We have to return to *Ezra* 9 to follow the proper sequence of events. The mention of the ninth month in *Ezra* 10:9 confirms the correctness of the restored order of the work. The chronology is right.

Some colonists had married wives of the native people—people who were supposed mythically to have been ethnic Jews, even if they had strayed from proper practice, as Jews and Christian pretend. The complaint is against the uncleanness of the men of the land, the native inhabitants of the hill country who were the same people as the "exiles", but the Chronicler picked out Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. There is only one reason why ethnic mixing should have been forbidden,

since there is not a shread of evidence that the Israelites were ethnically different from Canaanites. It is that the real complaint was against Egyptian women, because Egypt had declared UDI. So, the problem sounds ethnic—but it is really religious. The basis of it is the Zoroastrian one that marriage should be within the religion. The people who are called to Jerusalem are the “children of the captivity”—the colonists.

Josephus says Bagoas had offered to make Joshua the High Priest in a tendentious account which accuses Bagoas of polluting the temple, entering it in his capacity as governor to investigate the crime. Answering protestors, Bagoas, whose very name includes the Persian word for God, and who must have been a Zoroastrian, declared, “Am I not purer than he that was slain in the temple?” He was! Nothing was more impure than a corpse and no corpse worse than that of a dead priest. Bagoas was accusing the colonists of hypocrisy, and imposed an additional tax on their sacrifices for seven years.

What the basis of the quarrel was between the brothers is not stated, but the fact that Bagoas did not punish Johanan personally for a heinous murder shows that he was not plotting against him as Josephus says. Ezra (Ezra 10:6) spends the night with the murderous priest, Johanan, apparently condoning his action. Ezra must have considered the murder justified, and he had the power of life and death, so had the same view as Bagoas. Persian interests must have been served by the murder which, to judge from the subsequent actions of Ezra might have been connected with mixed marriages of temple officials and priests with women of a different religion, most probably Egyptian women being the main concern, as offering both religious and loyalty problems. Ezra speaks of the transgressions of the colonists, “those that had been carried away”. He means not the ones that had just returned with him, but the previous colonists who had made a bit of a pig's ear out of their duty. Down to the Dead Sea Scrolls words like “the Captivity” (the Golah) or “Captives” was a word of honour for the colonists. It is taken to refer to their captivity in Babylon, but the Babylonian Jews were obviously not captives and some, to judge by their names, did extremely well. Ezra is supposed to have been a Jew who became a Persian official. Nehemiah is the same, according to the bible. How are these people captives? The truth is the “Returners” were captives of Persia. The name The Golah became a name of pride for the colonists and used to distinguish them from the colonized. Ezra speaks of the “remnant”, a way of denoting the colonists as special as the Righteous Few while the Am ha Eretz and the apostatizing “returners” were unrighteous. He states clearly (Ezra 9:9) that they are still in bondage:

For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.

It is powerful propaganda. Ezra all the time speaks of “our God”, implying, if he was a Zoroastrian, that the gods were the same one, yet, if he really were Jewish, he continues the propaganda of Cyrus that the Persian kings were the agents of the Jewish God on earth. In the next but one verse he declares with utmost clarity that this is the time when the Jews possessed the land:

The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness.

This is just the attitude of the Persians to the “daevas”, the false gods of the Evil Creation that had to be destroyed and not compromised with. Plainly, Yehouah was a Yazata not a daeva, but the Baals were daevas.

There is no recognition here at all that the people of the land were themselves Israelites that had been left behind, there was no interest in them at all while they remained attached to their Baals, and there could be no intermarriage. At least in its concept of a good and an evil creation, Zoroastrianism has a theological basis for separation, but Judaism has none except an assumed superiority. Doubtless the women that the earlier “returners” had married had also been worshippers of Yehouah, but in the native Canaanite style. This is what the remnant had to stamp out and the reason why those of the restored faith had to divorce them. The apparent quotation from *Deuteronomy* (Ezra 10:11) seems to have been edited in the law itself (Deut 7:1-3) to get rid of Ezra’s statement that the land was unclean.

Like a good statesman and diplomat, Ezra gets the cooperation of some senior men, and examined the cases of mixed marriage over a two month period. The outcome is a list of those found guilty—only 111. It shows that the number of colonists must have been small.

### **The Law is Deuteronomy**

The action now moves back to *Nehemiah* chapters 9 and 10. In *Nehemiah* 9:6, God is described in relation to the heavens and the “heaven of heavens”, perhaps a suggestion of a heaven behind the heavens, a Zoroastrian idea because Ahuramazda is often described as wearing the “massy heavens” as his cloak. The nations in verse 9:8 are most of the nations already mentioned in connexion with the mixed marriages, yet it is supposedly referring to Abram, 1500 years before. And the covenant that the writer has just shown being introduced by Ezra is now cast back into the mythological past, showing that this, to the end of the speech, is all later composition. Its situation is manifestly false being a joint speech by eight Levites, and a long one for them to keep in synchronization, though modern versions attribute it to Ezra, as is likely to be correct.

The end reverts to the law and suggests that the law brought by Ezra was *Deuteronomy*. The feast of Booths was celebrated on the second of the seventh month. In JED of *Genesis* no date is given and in P it appears as the 15th day of the seventh month. P was evidently the final modification of the law. The reading of the law in *Nehemiah* 8:2-18 corresponds with *Deuteronomy* 31:11 but does not appear in P. The rejoicing and the paradoxical command not to mourn matches *Deuteronomy* 16:14-15. Gifts for the poor in *Nehemiah* 8:10 matches *Deuteronomy*. Women and children are introduced in *Nehemiah* 8:2 and also in *Deuteronomy*. Only the Holiness Texts (Lev 23:43) identify the Festival of Booths as a memorial of the Exodus.

Most significantly, P specifies the tenth of Tishri as the Day of Atonement, yet in this account it is not mentioned. Even though a solemn assembly is called on the eighth, nothing is said about the famous fast of the tenth, showing it was a later invention, yet is prescribed in P. This account makes a use of a law and events that back it up that precede the writing of P, the Priestly Code, and the Holiness Code of *Leviticus*. Indeed it implies that the Chronicler might not have known it, suggesting that it was later even than the historian.

Moreover, the introduction of the covenant in *Ezra* 10 has no hints that there had supposedly been a history of Israelite covenants. Whatever seems possibly to reflect them turns out to be common to all of the covenants, therefore giving no indication of priority, while what seems particular to this one does not look genuine—it is probably interpolated. Thus *Nehemiah* 10:33 begins an excerpt from P to explain the use to which the temple tax is put. The explanation would have been superfluous in context, so seems to have been added for non-Jewish readers! *Nehemiah* 10:36b-39 is an addition that echoes P but also echoes unnecessarily what has

been said in the previous two verses. Otherwise, *Nehemiah* 10:20 on mixed marriages is *Deuteronomy* 7:3 and has no parallel in P. Forgiving debts in the sabbath year (*Neh* 10:31) is *Deuteronomy* 15:2. The temple tax of *Nehemiah* 10:32 is only a third of a shekel, a sum that appears nowhere else. In P it is half a shekel, which puts P later on the grounds that taxes increased with the complexity and extent of the temple organization. The conclusion is that *Deuteronomy* and its source, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, preceded.

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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 3. Ezra & The Law

## The Foundation of Judaism (Part II): *The Work of Nehemiah and Ezra*

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### A Letter to Artaxerxes

The Aramaic passage *Ezra* 4:7-23 follows next. The mention of Xerxes in verse 6, Artaxerxes in verse 7 and Darius in verse 24 suggests that the Darius must be Darius II, but no biblical scholar seems to consider this nowadays, all of them assuming it must be an anachronistic reference to Darius I. If Darius II is meant then the “second temple” was built fully 100 years later than is imagined, about 417 BC.

The letter sent shows several misunderstandings that indicate it is not original, Aramaic or not, and had been composed or reconstructed by people who did not fully understand what it meant.

The difficulties of *Ezra* 4:7-11 concerning the names mentioned as authors of a letter to Artaxerxes have already been considered, and [Garbini](#) has given the explanation. The supposed names Bishlam and Mithridates are a misunderstanding of words that meant “on the folded wrapping” because a short summary of the contents were written on the outside of chancellery documents to facilitate the Persian bureaucracy. It shows that the Chronicler had fragments of an original document that he no longer understood.

The letter, apparently to Artaxerxes II, must have been written near the middle of the fifth century. The response somehow was the sending of Nehemiah as governor about 445 BC, after Artaxerxes had stopped the building. The complaint is against the “Jews” who “came up from you to us”. The Jews were not seen as “returning exiles” but people “sent”. They seem to have been ignoring the king’s order and restoring the temple, and refusing the assistance of the native worshippers of Yehouah. L E Browne in *Peake’s Commentary* says:

Exiles had been coming back from time to time in the course of nearly a century. There is no need to suppose they formed a distinct community in Jerusalem.

This typical Christian blindness or deceit flies in the face of all the evidence, even of the bible! The whole story of the “returners” is of a group coming into Judah as an elite.

Note that in *Ezra* 4:2, the Samaritans were deported under Esarhaddon, in *Ezra* 4:10, it is under Osnapper (Ashurbanipal) while in 2 Kings 17, it seems to have meant Shalmaneser.

### Egypt Secedes: Megabyxos Rebels

Pericles the leader of Athens had a base at Dor about 468 BC. The Greeks were likely to have supported the Egyptians in rebellion, so the base was of concern to the Persians. In fact, Greek mercenaries helped the Egyptians when they actually did rebel. Just before the return of Nehemiah, the satrap of Abarnahara, the noble general Megabyxos, had to put down a severe Egyptian rebellion (460-456 BC), but then rebelled himself

because his honour had been compromised (449 BC). He defeated the king's armies twice, and because Artaxerxes could not defeat him, but knowing him to be an honourable man, he offered a pact, and the two men seem to have returned to friendship. From then until the middle of the reign of Darius, except for a year of regnal squabbles before Darius II took control of the throne in 424 BC, there was a long period of peace. Advantage was taken of it to fortify Jerusalem and build up a dependent colony in Judah in case the Egyptians should again cause trouble.

The broken up book of *Ezra-Nehemiah* now continues at *Nehemiah 1*. Nehemiah is contrite over an event that supposedly happened over a century before. If the disaster were contemporary as the news and prayer imply, the walls and gates of Jerusalem must have been restored after the Babylonian destruction to be damaged again in this conflict. To be honest, we have to assume the latter because *Nehemiah 1:1-3* seems undoubtedly to suggest that the Jewish *settlers* had been punished with the implication that some had been sent into exile while some were allowed to remain behind but destitute. It is hard to see why an event that happened 140 years before should appear as if it were news, if the Babylonian exile were meant.

It is plain from *Nehemiah 7:4* that the city had been deserted, so there was no reason to build walls to protect the citizenry. It was built as a fortress. The true reason for the derelict state of Jerusalem and its need for fortification will have been the UDI declared by Egypt. If Megabyxos had punished the colonists for siding with the Egyptians in the rebellion of Inarus, the situation could have been as it is shown here. The Persians had been trying to get a reliable people settled in Jerusalem, because it was nicely placed to guard the routes into Asia. It was not on the direct route, being rather inaccessible on its hilltop site, but that was an advantage for a fortress and a base of operations. The Egyptian rebellion had made the need urgent, because they had sacked the undefended town or it had joined them in rebellion.

Nehemiah's prayer displays the sentiments of *Deuteronomy 30:1-4*, so in part might be a genuine fragment, but the rest looks like a pious composition to introduce *Nehemiah 2:1*. The restorer did not give a full and proper date to his restoration of *Nehemiah 1* because the next fragment he had was dated. So he built a composition around a small fragment he had to show Nehemiah's prayer, and the Jews coming in supplication, but he or another editor then added the wrong year—the same one as in chapter 2—making Nehemiah learn about the problem after he had responded to it. Christian commentators ask us to amend twentieth to nineteenth in *Nehemiah 1:1*—the Holy Ghost being slack again!

The chapter purports to explain how Nehemiah persuaded the king to change his mind about rebuilding the city. If the story is from the original, it is propaganda, otherwise it is a later romance. *Nehemiah 5:14* declares Nehemiah to have been the governor of Judah for twelve years, so our conclusions about the propaganda, or romance, are justified—Nehemiah was a Persian official. Before he was sent on this tour of duty he had been cupbearer to the king, a position that declared him to have been a Zoroastrian, because the king would never accept his drinks from unclean hands, and a trustworthy man, because his duty was to ensure that the king's drinks were not poisoned. If he was also a Jew, then Judaism was considered an acceptable variety of Zoroastrianism.

The Persian authorities seemed to realize that they had been pussyfooting in Yehud and now wanted decisive action. Nehemiah was sent out with a military escort (Neh 2:9) showing that the times were troubled. Ezra was given no escort. They used propaganda to get the colonists to do the work for them, adding gifts as



sweeteners. *Nehemiah* 3:5 and 3:27 show that even the wealthy who initially objected to doing manual work eventually helped out. But *Nehemiah* 4:10 suggests the truth that the colonists were a ruling class unaccustomed to such work.

The fact that the workers had to be armed to protect themselves makes the resistance they were facing sound more serious than mere objections. It sounds incredible that the authorities, the Persians, could not keep order and tends to confirm that we are looking not at any peaceable resistance but a troubled period of rebellions when the Persians were far from in control, because the Persian military were busy elsewhere, but they were succeeding in regaining control.

The results of the rebellion of Megabyxos occasioned the complaint to Artaxerxes. Even if the colonists had had permission to restore the temple and the city walls, it would have looked rebellious to chose this time to start, and so Artaxerxes stopped it. The complaint might have been just Jewish propaganda or their assumption. Artaxerxes might have stopped it as a sensible precaution under the circumstances.

Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, is known from an Elephantine papyrus dated 407 BC, that refers to his sons as Dalaiah and Shelemiah. His name seems to have a reference to Baalath, who is Astarte, suggesting he worshipped the older gods of Canaan, but it might be Babylonian (Shunibel or Sanbassar), so he was perhaps a colonist himself, but his sons were plainly brought up as Jews. Perhaps the daughter that married the grandson of Eliashub was brought up in the old religion, but if not, Nehemiah refused even to accept converted local women as Jews, at least so far as the priesthood was concerned. Of his allies, Tobiah also apparently worshipped Yehouah, but is described as an Ammonite. The family of the Tobiads appear again in the Greek period, so they were plainly influential.

Nehemiah in 5 inserts a parenthesis that shows the wealthier of the colonists had been exploiting even the less successful “returners”. These were troubled times and normal economic relations must have been under strain. The hills around Jerusalem were not easy to make a living from, and grain, for example, mainly had to be procured by trade in the market of Jerusalem. In these troubles, the poor were getting poorer and doubtless the rich richer, by exploiting scarcity. People were having to mortgage their children, their plots and even having to sell their children into slavery to survive—and these were “returners!” It might well have been that these poor colonists found themselves cut off by the natives and exploited by their own wealthy classes and so were worse off than either. Nehemiah sought the agreement of the wealthy to end this exploitation. Zoroastrianism always required charitable treatment of the poor.

Charles E Carter is sure that Jews outside of Yehud maintained the economy of the temple state. The assumption always is that many Jews did not return from exile, and it was these millions of wealthy Jews in Babylonia who supported their fellow Jews that returned. The Jews were supposedly in exile for 70 years. The ruling ten percent of a population that left 11,000 behind are thought to have gone into exile—1000 people! They were removed as captives and must have started out as slaves or at least landless labourers, yet only 70 years later, they had multiplied into millions of successful businessmen, banking in the top banks! Even if it was 170 years because the return was at the time of Darius II not Darius I, it is an impossible achievement. They would have had to double in numbers every generation for ten generations. If such a growth rate is to be defended, it means the exiles were not hindered but rather were favoured by the Persian rulers, they were interbreeding and they were proselytising, so that those who returned were not ethnically the same as those

who left. To accept it is to deny the Jews as an ethnic entity identifiable with the Israelites, and to deny them any ethnic connexion with Moses. The “Exile” is impossible, but Christians and Jews always insist upon it.

Yet, Carter is correct. The temple state was set up as the cult of the whole of Abarnahara. It is the people of Abarnahara who are the “peoples of the lands”, mentioned often in *Ezra-Nehemiah* and plainly different from the Am ha Eretz, who are the locals. The “peoples of the lands” are the Hebrews, and they it is who have to support the temple state. Yehud is like Washington DC, Canberra, Australia, or more accurately, the Vatican City. It was a religious state meant to gather the people for tithing. The three annual pilgrimages will have facilitated the collection of tithes and taxes from the Hebrews, and would bind them in unity. Carter writes:

The sacrifices were a form of taxation, designed to underwrite the priesthood and the temple officials.

And they were the tax men for the Persian state. *Nehemiah* 10:33-34 imposes a temple tax of 1/3 shekel, in addition to the sacrifices.

Nehemiah is keen to show that he is himself thrifty in the harsh conditions, not calling for the full resources he was entitled to for his diplomatic functions and feasts:

Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us. (Neh 5:17)

Where is the Jewish faddiness about table fellowship that they were famous for? Perhaps because the colonists were trained as a nation of priests of the Jerusalem temple, they later adopted the attitude of the Zoroastrian priests, who were particular about cleanliness and purity for the sake of their duties, and could be particular about eating alone, or only with those they knew to be clean.

Nehemiah is taken as a Jew, though he must have been a Zoroastrian, but what of the “rulers” and the “heathen?” Jews are distinguished from “rulers” and “those” of the heathen, presumably rulers of the “heathen” nations of Abarnahara not heathens themselves. The rulers, whether of the heathen or the Jews, were Persian officials and administrators, and therefore likely to have been Zoroastrian. If the Jews, as all this seems to suggest, were Zoroastrians too, or crypto-Zoroastrians acceptable as Zoroastrians, then this table fellowship would have been possible within the Zoroastrian laws of purity. Interestingly, the Septuagint omits “and rulers” from this passage. It was translated in Maccabaeen times and the Maccabees did not wish to suggest that the Jews did not rule themselves.

## **Who Were the Prophets?**

The next section is simply *Nehemiah* 6, but it contains an utterly crucial piece of information at *Nehemiah* 6:6-7. A letter comes to Nehemiah from Sanballat:

It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together.

The crucial information is in the words, “thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah”. It is an irrefutable admission that prophets were instruments of propaganda. Sanballat says that Nehemiah was already preparing the people for a coup by having prophets prophesy that he would be the king. It is exactly what we know that Cyrus and other Persian kings did to prepare the ground for his moves against countries like Babylon and Ionia.

Prophets were effectively *agents provocateur* who would begin whispering campaigns then, when they judged the time right, would make bold prophecies on behalf of their employer to prepare the people and get their support for his takeover, or social changes.

To imagine that the prophets of ancient Israel were anything other than these, is pure deceit. The Persians used prophets to spread ideas that were favourable to them, or alarm. Here it is proved in the bible itself, so Jewish and Christian commentators have always been aware of it. Only their flocks have not, and just in case they wonder, the commentators assure them that these are not true prophets! Thus Browne writes:

It is interesting to note the political use to which prophets were put. We sometimes forget the proportion of prophets who were concerned with promoting true religion was small. The rest were not necessarily followers of false gods, but as mere politicians and flatterers of kings, they were rightly described as “false prophets”.

Outrageous but feeble special pleading? Correct! If it were possible to distinguish true prophets from false prophets, there could be no use for false prophets at all. All prophets would be true prophets. If it is not possible to distinguish them, then prophecy is useless anyway—no one can know beforehand whether a prophet is a fake or not, so none of them should be listened to. How would any Christian or Jew know now whether the biblical prophets were true ones or not? Because they helped set up Judaism? That was the purpose of them as political agents of the Persian kings, so, according to Browne, they are false prophets! The Persian kings made use of prophets or oracles (the later prophecies of Zechariah are described as “oracles” in the bible) to create expectation and doubts. They were propagandists who did just what we read the biblical prophets doing. There is no reason at all to believe that the Jewish prophets were not agents of the Persian king.

Since Ezra at this time introduced the law called *Deuteronomy*, it is not surprising to find warnings there about prophets trying to persuade people to follow other gods:

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the Lord thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee. (Deut 13:1-5)

Even the reference to bondage in the land of Egypt is not amiss here, since the Egyptians had rebelled and the Persians were keen to keep the people of the hill country on side. Indeed, references such as these will certainly have led to the later elaboration of them into the bogus history of slavery in Egypt in the Bronze Age. The importance of prophecy at this time as a propaganda tool both ways is also highlighted elsewhere in *Deuteronomy*:

I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, *and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.* And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. But *the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.* And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

They Persian chancellery knew its own provocateurs, agents and spies, and promised to murder those of the other side, the normal risk of the profession still today, but there is no way an innocent bystander could know in advance true prophets from false prophets. One side or the other must come out on top and that is the only way of telling. The Persian kings were confident of having prophecy on their side—the prophets were their own agents. The earlier kings at least, like Cyrus and Darius, were certain they were battling the Evil Creation on behalf of God, Ahuramazda. They could use prophets as propaganda machines to help their victory, and when it came, it proved that they were doing right and God was on their side. Unless the Assyrians used prophets in the same way, as propaganda, which is possible, most of the biblical prophets are Persian, and their purpose was to get support for the colonists from the native Am ha Eretz.

The genealogy here is the same as the one in Ezra, and is unnecessary. Nehemiah is calling for a conference not a list of ancestors, and the results of the conference are announced in *Nehemiah* 11:1. The deserted city—it is latter half of the the fifth century BC and Jerusalem is still deserted after 150 years—has to be populated so the leaders are obliged to move in, along with one in ten drawn by lots, and some volunteers. The Jews were hardly dying to get in there, but a populated city is quickly created by these tough and unpopular measures.

## **When was the Dedication of the Walls?**

The final episodes are the ceremony of inauguration of the walls and some incidents in a second period of office after Nehemiah had been away for an unspecified time period. Few people seem to notice that the dedication of the walls takes place in this second period of office, not the first twelve year period. In *Nehemiah* 13:4 Nehemiah writes, “Now before this”, referring to the dedication of the wall, and proceeds to describe an incident that occurred in his furlough between his periods of duty (Neh 13:6). The dedication must therefore have been on his return in his second period of duty. Building the walls cannot have been an easy task, despite God’s finger, and with a limited work force will have taken years not the two months of Zerubabel. Josephus says it took two years and eight months. It seems it took over twenty years, which is more credible, especially if the task was held up for a long period by royal command.

The incident was that the former opponent of the temple reconstruction, Tobiah, obtains a room within the temple, polluting it. Nehemiah once more solves the problem, and another—that various Levites had not been paid and so had returned to the fields to make a living. Nehemiah then prays to God using the sentence “wipe not out my good deeds”. The Zoroastrians believed that they were saved on the basis of their deeds, their good deeds and wicked deeds being accounted in the *Book of Life* for the Judge to consider when judgement of the soul was made.

Ezra the scribe led the procession in *Nehemiah* 12:36, so he was attending the ceremony too. Doubtless it was the sort of duty a man in his high office had to perform. If this dedication of the walls happened in a second period of office of Nehemiah beginning about 430 BC, it could have been in the reign of Darius II (424-404 BC). *Nehemiah* 13:1 says that the occasion of the dedication of the walls was the same occasion as the reading of the law and the introduction of the feast of Booths. *Nehemiah* 13:3 seems to correspond with *Nehemiah* 9:2 in saying that the Jews then separated themselves from foreigners, also tying the two events together. At about the same time (419 BC), a papyrus directs the Jews of Elephantine to keep the Passover, suggesting that the Persian Office of Religious affairs had decided to regulate Judaism everywhere.

The dating of Ezra might, therefore, be neither Artaxerxes I or Artaxerxes II but Darius II. The compiler, unable to distinguish between these Persian kings thought “year seven of Darius” meant Darius I, and was impossible, so rejected it in favour of Artaxerxes—who had already been mentioned in the context of Nehemiah—because the two men were contemporaries at the dedication. Ezra really came in year seven of Darius II (417 BC) specifically to dedicate the walls and to introduce the new law. It was an opportune time because the Egyptians were again rebelling, and a reliable fortress and loyal people in Jerusalem had become a necessity. He discovered the mixed marriages and had to deal also with the separating out of people, that Nehemiah’s had been unable to complete. Ezra was therefore never a “returner” and could not appear in lists of them, and was never a High Priest of the Jerusalem temple, though he was the senior priest in the Persian empire.

## **Darius I or Darius II?**

It would have to be considered whether Zerubabel was another name for Ezra that has falsely been associated with Darius I when Darius II was correct. In other words, was the return under Darius I or under Darius II? Some clues are:

- ❑ The word for a local governor used of Nehemiah, “Tirshatha”, is possibly anachronistic applied to a Zerubabel in the time of Darius the Great, but fine for one in the time of Darius II.
- ❑ In the lists of *Ezra* 2:2 and *Nehemiah* 7:7, Ezra does not appear, but Zerubabel does. Though Ezra was not a “returner”, the Chronicler thought he was, but seemed to know he was already listed as Zerubabel.
- ❑ The mention of “Darics” in *Ezra* 2:69 is likely to be anachronistic if Zerubabel was coming in the second year of Darius I. Darius introduced them, but it is hard to imagine them in use at such an early date—the time of the later Darius seems more likely.
- ❑ Much of chapter 3 anticipates the later reforms of Ezra, though the compiler mistakenly includes some Priestly Code (burnt offerings).
- ❑ The hostility of the Am ha Eretz in *Ezra* 3:3 suggests a later date, after their offer to assist had been rejected.
- ❑ The whole of *Ezra* 5:1 to *Ezra* 6:18 is in Aramaic, presumably to give the impression it is official, but

Elamite was the chancellery language until Artaxerxes I introduced Aramaic. If the record is based on a genuine document, therefore, it is more likely to have been from the time of Darius II.

- ❑ The three references in *Ezra* 5 to Abernabara (“Beyond the River”) is anachronistic in the time of Cyrus or Darius I, but not in the time of Darius II, because the satrapy was introduced in the time of Xerxes.
- ❑ Though Tatnai seems to have been an official of the first Darius, the lost edict must be a romance if the Darius is the first one, ruling only eight years after Cyrus, but would be credible if this Darius is a hundred years later.
- ❑ The decree of Cyrus, according to *Ezra* 6:2, was found on a roll, presupposing the use of Aramaic, but it would have been on a tablet in cuneiform in the time of the early kings of Persia.
- ❑ The statement of *Ezra* 6:14 mentioning the three kings Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes would not be anachronistic in the reign of Darius II.
- ❑ In *Ezra* 10:16, the word translated “to examine” (l’drosh) actually says “Darius” (l’dryosh), as if it were part of the date—the year and name of the king, though the year is absent. If Darius II was intended, a scribe knowing only Darius the Great has garbled it to correct an apparent error.
- ❑ Nehemiah served Artaxerxes I in Susa, but Ezra, an important minister, seemed to serve the king in Babylon. In the reign of Darius II, the palace at Susa burned down and the king, who was half Babylonian, spent more time with his court in Babylon than earlier kings.
- ❑ It is unlikely that the Persian royal archives were kept at Babylon so soon after the Persian conquest, but is a valid assumption for the later Darius whose capital Babylon effectively was. The record was found at Egbatana, where the early archives would have been kept.
- ❑ The Jewish scriptures confuse Persia with Babylon. Artaxerxes king of Babylon (*Neh* 13:6), Artaxerxes king of Persia (*Ezra* 7:1). Cyrus king of Babylon (*Ezra* 1:1f, 3:7), Cyrus king of Persia (*Ezra* 4:3). Jews coming from Babylon before the time of Darius II would not have made such an error.
- ❑ If the temple were completed in the last month of the sixth year of Darius II (*Ezra* 6:15), the final dedication ceremony of the rebuilt city and the appearance again of Ezra to read the law would make sense in the following year.

The compiler has confused the reigns of the two kings, introducing certain anachronisms. The initial restoration of Jerusalem after the victory of Cyrus was a purely civil matter carried out by Sheshbazzar but, as a Persian administrator with no associations with Jewish affairs, and moreover assisted by the native inhabitants not any colonizing Jews, his role has been cut to the rump. This was the view of W H Kusters in his dispute with J Wellhausen, so long ago that everyone has now forgotten it. Kusters had also noticed that the dedication ceremony was in the second period of Nehemiah, but Wellhausen’s great personal prestige quashed Kusters’ correct hypothesis, which was too radical for biblicists.

The Chronicler had put in an early return under Zerubabel. Ezra had been mistakenly identified with the mythical apocalyptic Saoshyant Zerubabel (Babylonian Zarathustra), and thought to have been a governor. He has the title “Salvation of Yehouah”, Joshua, and has therefore been mistaken for two separate people within the one story—which one was the putative messiah? The implication of *Nehemiah* 12:32 is that Hoshaiiah led the group that *Nehemiah* 12:36 says was led by Ezra. Hoshaiiah is a variant of Joshua, also meaning “Salvation of Yehouah”.

Zerubabel and Joshua in this scheme begin to look more unlikely and more like the ciphers they actually are. Both are the same eschatological saviour (saoshyant) mistaken by later chroniclers as historical figures and



falsely made to return on the example of Ezra and Nehemiah. They also had to be found places in the genealogies by those who compiled them later. The genealogies are of limited value. The list of High Priests in *Nehemiah* 12 is only partial, so how can anyone have faith in the extensive lists when a relatively short one is inadequate? Here they are anachronistic themselves, as is shown by the fact that Jaddua, the High Priest in the time of Alexander the Great finishes the list (unless there was another unknown Jaddua). However, just before then, in *Nehemiah* 12:22, Eliashib a priest contemporary with Nehemiah (*Neh* 13:4) is spoken of in the context of “Darius the Persian”. It cannot be Darius the Great, could be Darius III, since Jaddua is also mentioned here, but probably means Darius II, the Darius who saw all this happen.

The genealogies were all compiled years later because of the requirements of purity of stock that Ezra imposed. M Dandamaev has shown that the practice in Persian Babylonia was to link cult membership with citizenship by heredity. Not until this practice had been set up in Yehud would genealogies have been necessary or made sense. In *Nehemiah* 7:5, the “finding” of “the book of the genealogy of them which came up at the first” is attributed to Nehemiah in his own words, but such books are not simply “found” and the whole of this section with its genealogy is plainly a later insertion, doubtless by the priests.

The presence of mythological figures in these genealogies proves that they are inventions. They were used to establish the *status quo*, and who had different genealogies to contest whatever they said? The Persian rules linking citizenship and heredity made these genealogies into fictional title deeds like those forged in large numbers by medieval monks to allow the church to grab land to which it really had no entitlement. As anthropologist M Fortes points out, the lineage genealogy was not meant to be accurate but stood for the current class structure legitimized by being “projected backwards as pseudo-history”.

The Chronicler probably had no idea that there was more than one Darius and more than one Artaxerxes. He also could not imagine Jerusalem without the properly functioning temple he was used to, nor accept that for a hundred years after the edict of Cyrus, effectively no colonization had occurred, even though Yehud had been apparently designated a temple state and a formal foundation had been laid. He therefore decided that Zerubabel was a different man from Ezra, and had arrived in the reign of the great Darius, not the lesser one, and the myth of an early return thus began.

## Population

K Hoylund has noted a change of Persian foreign policy in Palestine from the mid-fifth century, suggested by the construction of a chain of fortresses. More fortresses of the same period are much further south in the Negeb, indicating Egypt as the perceived danger. Under the Persians, the Phœnicians controlled the whole of the coastline into Philistia—Ashkelon was Phœnician—and the Plain of Sharon. Dor and Ashdod were the centres of their own districts, as was Lachish, which seemed to control the Shephelah. Lachish might have been a frontier town between Persia and Egypt when Egypt seceded from the empire, as it often did, so Yehud in the hills and the Negeb with its line of forts would have been essential to Persian defence. From this time, Jerusalem was repopulated and Yehud began to become important, and Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem with the mission to build up the walls of the city.

The bible tells us 800,000 (2 *Sam* 24:9) or perhaps 1,100,000 (1 *Chr* 21:5) men drew the sword in Israel, and 500,000 (2 *Sam* 24:9), or 470,000 (1 *Chr* 21:5) men drew the sword in Judah. It requires no genius to realize

that the populations of these countries would have to be a minimum of four times bigger. Yet, Charles E Carter of Seton Hall University, NJ, using the most up-to-date surveys, finds the population of Yehud was 11,000 at the start of the Persian period and increased to 17,000 a hundred years later. Most of the sites in Yehud (67 percent) were small villages of less than 125 people. About 25 percent had a population from 125 to 300, and only 10 percent were bigger. Of these only four were bigger than 600 people, and the settled part of Jerusalem was about 1500. The total population of the Palestinian Hills was only about 60,000, according to M Broshi and I Finkelstein, over 100 times less than the bible claims.

The lists in *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* suggest about 40,000 returners. Comparison with these surveys show that the lists were not of contemporary returners, and earlier estimates of the population of Judah as 200,000 had been made to accomodate this spurious biblical data. If 17,000 was the maximum, it also includes the native people—supposedly the brethren of the “Exiles”—who were stripped of their land by the colonists to become labourers or slaves. Such a small population could not have supported a literary tradition such as that supposed that produced or treasured the works of the prophets and the ancient works of Moses. Indeed, it could not have built let alone supported a substantial temple. The traditions relating to Solomon having assistance from Hiram of Tyre will reflect the truth that the “second” temple was built by the people of the Persian Satrapy of Abarnahara, not just by its tax collectors and sacerdotal arm that were called Jews.

## Who were Jews?

Mark Hamilton asks, “What defines a Jew?” For Jews, the distinction is circumcision. Discussing circumcision (*Histories* 2:104), Herodotus says Colchians, Cappadocians, Egyptians and Ethiopians were all circumcised and the habit came from the Egyptians or the Ethiopians originally. The Syrians he distinguished in name from the Phœnicians but says that both are circumcised. Noting elsewhere (*Histories* 7:89) that the Phœnicians and Syrians of Palestine furnished triremes to the Persian navy, Herodotus seems to regard the Syrians of Palestine as being, in practice, the same as Phœnicians. The “Syrians of Palestine” must be the Jews.

It was under the Persians that “Jew” became a religious term. The Danish anthropologist, Fredrik Barth, has pointed out that ethnicity expresses itself most clearly at the boundaries. One can spot a Jew when they are dealing with non-Jews.

The Elephantine papyri portrayed a Jewish military colony, but the Jews there were not like those portrayed in the bible. Their religion was not solely devoted to Yehouah, confirming that the homogeneity of biblical monotheism misrepresented a polytheistic religion in Israel. The Elephantine community was part of a larger Aramaic-speaking garrison stationed at the First Cataract (Syene) to guard the frontier with Nubia. This had been the border of Egypt since the Old Kingdom, and, according to Herodotus (*Histories* 2:30), there had been an Egyptian garrison here from the time of Psammetichus (mid-seventh century BC), though he does not call them Jews, observing that the garrison were Persians. In the Roman era, it was the base of Legio I.

The Elephantine papyri show the boundaries of Jewishness at Elephantine did *not* concern:

1. the family—intermarriage was possible, whether frequent or not,
2. business—interethnic business was common,
3. law—the business papyri are like other Aramaic and even Mesopotamian legal texts of the same time

period,

4. settlement patterns—Jews and non-Jews lived as immediate neighbours in Elephantine,
5. proscribed ideas—Jewish reading material included the wisdom tale of Ahiqar, which referred to non-Jewish deities.

In several legal papyri the party involved is identified as a “Jew of Elephantine” or an “Aramaean of Syene” (Syene being a town on the east bank of the Nile opposite Elephantine Island). “Aramaean of Elephantine” appears occasionally and “Jew of Syene” once. This naming occurs only in the introductions of a legal contract, never in the list of witnesses, even when the names in the list are of different linguistic origins. Equivalent distinction are not made elsewhere such as in the Samaria Papyri. But Masheiah bar Jedaniah was called an Aramaean of Syene in 471 BC, a Jew of Elephantine in the 460s and 450s, and an Aramaean of Syene again in the 440s. Similarly, Meshullam bar Zaccur was an Aramaean of Syene and a Jew of Elephantine. Anani bar Haggai was an Aramaean of Elephantine and a Jew of Syene.

The Jewish temple was the center of community activities. A list of names (and patronymics) and their contributions to “Yehouah the God” is dated to “year 5”, presumably of Darius II. So, the tally was made in 419 BC. The names are arranged by century, followed by the name of a commander. The commanders have Babylonian names, Siniddin, Nabuaqad. These centuries seem to be the equivalent of the Roman military units, subunits of the “daglin” referred to throughout the papyri. Some of the contributors’ names in the list are Persian, Hori, Bagaphernes and Vashi. The money was divided among Yehouah, Eshembethel, and Anathbethel.

How are these peculiarities to be explained? The simple explanation is that Jew and Aramaean meant the same. The whole district seems to have been called Syene, not just the town of that name, so included Elephantine. To judge by names, worship of Yehouah signified a Jew. Some Aramaeans were called Jews because they worshipped Yehouah, rather than because they came from Judah, but these Jews had a temple which Yehouah shared with other deities. Yehouism at Elephantine did not exclude worship of other deities, and the Jews worshipped Eshembethel and Anathbethel with other Aramaeans. Outsiders could enter the group, perhaps through intermarriage, as long as they participated in this worship. What is important is that the community’s definition of its religion was different from the biblical norm.

Judea and Samaria were at the center of the Jewish community. Hamilton agrees that the bible was put together at this time, and it portrays Jerusalem as the center of Judaism. Too little is known about Samaria, but the Persians were obviously setting up a temple state in Yehud.

Eight of the papyrus letters show a steady escalation of tension during the last decade of the fifth century between the Jewish community and the Egyptian Khnum priesthood on Elephantine island. The Yehouah priests Jedaniah and Uriah are said to know that “Khnum, he has been against us from the time Jedaniah was in Egypt until now”. Eventually, the Jewish temple was destroyed.

Why would Egyptians have felt threatened by the Jewish temple? The likely reason was that temple served an army of mercenaries. At a time of Egyptian nationalism, the temple seemed an insult to Egypt itself. Nominally the garrison was to guard against Nubia, but in practice it was an occupation army, or was seen that way. One could understand destroying the temple as an episode in the mounting unrest which led to Egyptian independence c 403 BC. The Jews may have been disliked by the Egyptians, but, for the Persians, they were

keepers of the peace.

Curiously, a Persian commander helped to destroy the temple. Vidranga, the Persian commander or frataraka, connived with the Egyptian troops to demolish it. Had Vidranga attacked the temple without any motivation? The revised draft of a letter, appealing to the governors of Judea and Samaria, for assistance, suggests he was bribed but not the first draft. A later note observed that the Persian government had always protected the Jewish temple, even when Cambyses had destroyed Egyptian temples in the same area. The most likely answer to the plot is that Persian policy was to destroy all Jewish centers except the one being sponsored by the Persians in Jerusalem.

The “Passover Letter”, dating from 419 BC is by one Hananiah, an emissary of Darius II who orders the Jewish garrison to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread—keeping the feast was apparently a mark of proper Jewish behavior. Mark Hamilton confirms that “support of religious unity within ethnic groups was an important part of Persian domestic policy, as the careers of Ezra and the Egyptian scribe and reformer Udjahorresnet indicate”, but here the existence of the letter suggests that there was disunity over the celebration. Some scholars assume that the Elephantine Jews had not observed the feast before, but the “Passover Letter” gives only the briefest instructions as to keeping the feast (no leaven in houses) and it seems the Elephantine priests must have known what the ritual was. The Passover was a Canaanite seasonal celebration that the priests were celebrating in a traditional way that differed from the a new interpretation being placed upon it by the Persian colonists in Jerusalem.

In the correspondence between Elephantine and Judea, the worship of Aramaean deities never arises. A E Cowley, implies Judean approval for the rebuilding of the Elephantine temple and the resumption of the grain and incense offerings. Since the Judeans cannot have approved of the worship of Aramaean deities, this approval means either that they were unaware of the other deities of Elephantine, or that a condition was the removal of them. Nothing is known about any rebuilding ever taking place and it seems unlikely.

A shocking episode in *Ezra-Nehemiah* is Ezra's enforcement of the ban on intermarriage. With a few exceptions everyone agreed with Ezra that intermarriage was certain to provoke divine wrath. Ezra persuades his audience by a prayer, which seems to reflect Deuteronomic theology, depicting intermarriage as revolt against Yehouah. Foreign husbands (*Ezra* 9:15; cf *Neh* 10:31) were included as well as wives, so the rule against intermarriage does not assume that a Jew is the offspring of a Jewish woman, but two Jewish parents. *Ezra* 10:18-44 lists the men who had married foreign women. The whole proceeding seems irregular in terms of Near Eastern law, but matches Zoroastrianism. His concern is with the purity of the community and the maintenance of its boundaries. *Ezra-Nehemiah* often refers to the Persian government. The central authority is behind the reconstruction of the temple, the legal reforms of Ezra, and the fortification of Jerusalem. According to *Ezra* 4:1-5, the local inhabitants of Judea sought to help the colonists rebuild the temple because they too worshipped Yehouah. Zerubbabel declared their claim invalid. Zerubbabel says:

For we alone will build for Yehouah the God of Israel just as King Cyrus, king of Persia commanded us...

The exiles were claiming to be the true Jews because the Persians said they were. The imperial letters, considered to be based on genuine ones, show that the Persian government favored a pro-Jewish policy in Palestine. Jewishness was first of all displayed in religion. The community cooperated to build a temple, and

then a wall which, whatever its significance as a defence in the increasingly unstable region, Nehemiah depicted as a testament to piety. Ethnicity was a matter of descent. *Nehemiah* 10:28-39 is a requirement for Jews of Jerusalem to collect tithes and taxes for the Persians and store them in a treasury. They also agree to avoid miscegenation, keep the Sabbath, holidays, and the Sabbath Year.

*Ezra-Nehemiah* contains genealogical lists purporting to be a census of the returning exiles. In *Ezra* 2:61-63 (*Neh* 7:63-65), the priestly genealogy did not include the descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz and Barzillai, people who believed themselves to be, and were believed by others to be, priests. Yet since their names were not in the authoritative genealogy, they could not function in the role. The genealogy did not indicate Jewishness, but priestly status. Focusing attention on the lineages apparently enjoyed Persian encouragement. The policy of the community allowed them to view themselves as recreating pre-exilic Judah. Core ethnic behavior meant a reassertion of what was believed by the ethnos to be its true historical identity.

## Ethnicity

Commentators talk incessantly of ethnicity being the distinction between the “returners” and the Am ha Eretz, and the source of the mixed-marriage problem in *Ezra-Nehemiah* that is now such an embarrassment to Christians, if not Jews. They forget that the people returning were supposed to have been of the same ethnic stock as those left behind to become the Am ha Eretz. Harold C Washington of Saint Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, notes that the land was left to “the vinedressers and the husbandmen” (2 *Kg* 25:12) when the landowning classes were carried off by Nebuchadrezzar. Ezekiel would have none of this in his role as an official propagandist and declared to the colonists that God had given them the land “as a possession” (*Ezek* 11:15), so they had God’s sanction to dispossess the natives of the land:

Thus saith the Lord God, I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. (*Ezek* 11:17)

Any ethnic mixing that occurred must have happened to those in exile. The problem of mixed marriage, if it is interpreted as ethnic in origin, is proof that the people being returned were not the descendents of those who left. They were colonists who thought nothing about the locals or their religion because they had a clear mission to introduce a new form of worship based on Zoroastrianism. Washington says:

The returning exiles responded to local opposition by conceiving themselves typologically as the generation of a new conquest.

The truth is that this was the conquest! The myth built later was probably begun as an allegory of the taking of the land by the “captives” sent by the Persians to colonize this part of Palestine. *Judges* tells the story, the first administrators of the country being magistrates appointed by the Persian officials. The various tribes and the opponents they meet are groups of colonists and the local Canaanites that they had to displace. In *Joshua*, the whole thing was multiplied even further, the conqueror of the land, Joshua, doubtless being based on the legendary High Priest of Haggai, and then the tribes moving into the land of milk and honey had to have an origin, whence the Exodus myth.

The colonial elite had to be supported by the peasantry of agrarian natives, but how were the peasants made

to give up part of their wealth for the layabouts in the city? The peasantry can only resent coercion by military might. Better is to get the peasant to agree willingly. That is why gods were invented. As soon as the peasant can be persuaded that ill-fortune will come of them failing to please the gods, the elite is secure. The purpose of the temple was to support the local elite of temple functionaries supposedly serving God but really serving the Persian king. In *Nehemiah* 10:37, a function of the levites is to collect the “levy”, the taxes.

*Ezra* 6:21 admits that there were people from among “the filthiness of the heathen of the land” that were admitted into the community of “returners”. How did they differ from the other who remained filthy and were rejected? The verse shows it was on the basis of acceptance of the new cult. Plainly the filthy people wanted to stick to their filthy practices—their age old religion, one god at least of which (Yehouah) was the same as that of the cult being imposed.

At first, the conversion index must have been slight. Why should the local people be persuaded to convert to a cult being brought in by the upstarts? Later, though, the benefits would have been clearer and the propaganda of the prophets must have taken its toll. The Jewish caste system plainly reflects the situation: Priests, Levites, Israelites and Proselytes. Priests and Levites were “the captivity”, the colonists sent in by the Persians to rule the temple state. The Israelites were converts from among the Am ha Eretz and ordinary proselytes were converts from among other people.

What then was the problem over exogamous marriages? It was obviously that the marriage partner would not give up their affection for the older religion. *Ezra-Nehemiah* suggests a long period of investigation—too long to have been necessary. Everyone must have known who the culprits were. Women were allowed into the assemblies to which Ezra read the law (*Neh* 8:2-3), which took an oath of allegiance to it (*Neh* 10:28-29) and that demanded the cases of expulsion (*Ezra* 10:1). They could also own property. What took the time was the effort trying to persuade some of the marriage partners to convert to the new cult. In the end only about 100 refused! They might have had other reasons for being happy to allow the marriage to be annulled, especially if there was any settlement with the divorcement.

All great empires seek homogeneity of race and religion—except perhaps among an exclusive ruling class—to reduce tensions and the potential for rebellion. The Persians were no different. The Persian kings knew of the importance of religion and, arguably, the later kings deliberately yielded the strictest Zoroastrianism to the expediency of having the friendly, honest accessibility of a Mithras and the womanly understanding of a goddess Anahita because they were popular. Catholic Christianity was expedient in the same way. The Persians themselves seemed like the Normans in England or the pioneers in the USA—they were not keen to mix with the native stock and tended to keep themselves aloof in their own estates guarded by armed attendants who would rally to the call of their neighbours if they were attacked by local mobs. In Yehud, the colonists despised the Israelites, considering themselves superior and entitled to carve out their own estates from the land held by the Am ha Eretz. They themselves were certainly mixed, with little in common except their joint religion imposed by the Persians and their duty as colonists to obey Persian orders or have their protection withdrawn.

## Culture

The destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 BC was widespread if not complete.

Charles E Carter



Jerusalem was not the administrative centre of the Babylonian district or province. It was Mizpah. The temple and perhaps the city, if the bible is right about when the first temple was destroyed, were in ruins for 168 years from 586 BC to 418 BC, and after the initial work nothing was done for 110 years. When Jerusalem was repopulated, Kenyon's excavations showed it to have been smaller than the Iron II city, its walls being within the earlier ones, but good signs of Persian period occupation were found outside those walls. Nevertheless, the city was small, confined to the south eastern spur and temple mount with little occupation of the western hill. Since *Nehemiah* 6:10-11 suggests that a temple did already exist, it might not have been a built temple but an open space on a high place.

Thomas Willi of Greifswald University in Germany notices a cultural change from the mid-fifth century. En Gedi reached its peak of prosperity late in the fifth century. Excavations there are unusual in showing a full range of Persian pottery together with some Greek pots (Attic ware), Yehud Persian seal impressions, substantial building remains and even signs of industrial activity. From then to the end of the Persian period, the site seemed to decline. Through the fifth century, the use of seals increased as did the use of coins, though they were not common until the beginning of the fourth century. Beth Zur, one of the few Persian sites excavated, has yielded a quantity of coins all dating from the early fourth century. Carter coyly notes that "more than a few" sites were settled only in the late fifth and early fourth centuries! Bethel was only resettled late in the Persian period. Most biblical "scholars" think the post-Exilic settlement of the country was a century earlier.

These sites show a mixture of Persian and Hellenistic pottery that Carter describes as "problematic", though the "problem" would presumably be immediately solved if Greeks, or peoples from countries occupied or colonized by Greeks, were among the people being settled in Yehud. The Hellenistic period begins mysteriously early in Palestine, so that the Persian occupation seems hardly testified to in the ground, or is invisible. What better explanation could there be than that many colonists were Greeks brought from Ionia, Caria or even Egypt?

The incident of the Greeks ordered by the Persian queen to be killed, though Megabixos had promised them lenience for their surrender, might suggest that Greek footsoldiers who surrendered with them were placed as colonists in Yehud to guard against their former allies. Spartan volunteers might have been among them. The Spartans, who were often allied with the Persians against Athens, about this time were fighting the Athenians in the Peloponnesian war funded by Persian gold. The Spartans intrigued with the Satraps of the West against Athens. The attachment of Ionia to Persia was the price. This was achieved a few decades later under the treaty called the *King's Peace* of 386 BC. Perhaps loyal Spartans were rewarded with estates and privileged duties in the temple colony of Yehud with captured Ionian nobles as slaves. According to the *Anabasis*, Xenophon's Ten Thousand seemed to escape around 400 BC, but perhaps not all did. Alexander later settled Macedonian veterans near here in Samaria. Was it because the Hellenistic milieu made them feel at home? Later, in Maccabaeian times, the Jews peculiarly claimed kinship with the Lacedaemonians—the Spartans! This has always seemed bizarre, but the explanation could be as simple as this given here, once it is accepted that the "returners" were not Israelites but colonists, the leaders of whom were Greeks. Was the Hebrew bible originally Greek?

Commentators speak about a Jewish aristocracy among the people who had just returned from a minimum of three generations of slavery in exile (presumably a great leveller), were all aristocrats before they were exiled, and could hardly have established a new aristocracy among themselves in the short time they had been

back. *Nehemiah* 6:17 uses the word “horim”, translated as nobles, but it looks to be nothing less than an Hebraized plural of the Iranian word “ahura”. Literally, then it meant “lords”, and suggests that some of the “returners” were “lords” by virtue of their authority through the Persian administration.

Ezra repeatedly calls the colonists “captives”, yet they were supposedly now free, and indeed they were free to be so extremely successful in Babylonia that many did not want to return, or so we are told. It does not seem to stir the minds of commentators convinced they are reading the “word of the Lord” that the “returners” were indeed “captives”. In fact, most were not free! They *were* captives and had been sent as captives by the Persians specifically to colonize this poor country—a hard task, but one which offered riches once they accomplished the task successfully of setting up a temple and a treasury for their masters. They were exiles not because their ancestors had once been exiled from their home in the Palestinian hills but because they themselves were exiled *to* the Palestinian hills from their original homes elsewhere!

## The Founder of Judaism

Whether Zerubabel is Ezra or not, the whole of *Ezra-Nehemiah* is vital to understanding the historical origins of Judaism. Even though the judicious mixing up of the text and the confusion of characters make it hard to understand, it is usually ignored by Christian teachers and Sunday schools. The truth is that Ezra laid the foundation of Judaism from a ministry of the Persian empire, apparently in the reign of Darius II. The rest of it was built backwards in time from then, firstly perhaps by bilocating Ezra himself, then using the Assyrian king lists, and lastly using fiction.

For centuries, biblical scholars have noted the absence of references to Moses in large swathes of the scriptures, and explain him as “presupposed” by the writers! It is as preposterous as explaining the absence of Christ in the *New Testament* because he was presupposed. He might have been presupposed but was not absent. The absence from the scriptures of Moses—the founder of the Jewish nation and the founder of their religion, the giver of their laws and, for a Jew, the greatest Jew that has ever lived—except in *Exodus* and *Numbers* is so profound that it has huge significance. It means that he is an afterthought in the Jewish bible, and *Exodus* and *Numbers* are among the last of the Jewish canon. These books were written long after the law and long after Yehud had been set up—to justify and explain them!

R F Person has attributed the work of the Deuteronomist to the Persian period. Moses is a variant of Mazda, and therefore a name of God, from the beginning when Ezra read out *Deuteronomy*—the law of Mazda. Moses was not a title of God and so the law of Moses looked incongruous to later Jews who puzzled about it or sought to cover up its true meaning. Moses was therefore mortalized as the man to whom God had given his law for presentation to the people. Later still, a myth was invented to explain this and the right of the Jews to be in the hills of Palestine. *Genesis* was added before the end of the Persian empire.

The Chronicler, if he was not as late as the Maccabees, wrote in the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus or Ptolemy III Euergetes, from 285 to 222 BC. Both were keen supporters of Judaism and its temple. This will be when the Priestly Code was written. Ptolemy Philadelphus undertook to add the Torah to his new library in Greek translation, so the priests were inspired to codify their laws in *Leviticus*, and polish up the Pentateuch. Added myths justifying the ambitions of the Maccabees gave Jews the right to what had been the whole of Abarnahara—the united empire of David and Solomon.

Ezra is the true founder of Judaism.

Rev J H Box *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*

The later tendency, under the Greeks and Maccabees, was to eliminate Ezra from the bible. Ben Sira mentions Nehemiah but not Ezra. People influenced by the Greeks would have wanted to reduce the dependence of their myths on the Persians, and once the mythological saga of Moses had been elaborated, presumably under the Ptolemies, Ezra rather gave the game away. In *2 Maccabees* 1:18-36, Nehemiah was the founder of the second temple and Ezra was no longer in view. That Ezra appears today in the Jewish scriptures is undoubtedly an oversight, probably caused by the disruption of the Jewish War and the Bar Kosiba revolt (66 and 132 AD).

### Was Ezra a Fiction?

There is another hypothesis to explain the absence of Ezra, and it is put by Giovanni Garbini, a firm disbeliever in the Persian idea of Jewish origins. He denies that *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* in the Jewish scriptures tell real history. Ezra therefore never did come from Persia with the law. He argues that Ezra is pure fiction. The character, Ezra, came out of a second century dispute between Jewish factions over a trellis-like wall in the courts of the temple that separated the holy priests from the profane Israelites. He says that:

No Jewish work whether in the bible or not shows knowledge of the great Ezra before Flavius Josephus.

He is speaking of the specific form "Ezra" of the name but there are other expressions of it, including very probably in the bible, Zerubabel. Criticisms of the sequence of Persian kings in the biblical *Ezra*, do show that the account was far from contemporary, but what biblical books are? The only problems in the sequence are that the author does not know of Cambyses, who only reigned a short time, and he does not realise there are two Dariuses. He refers in fact to the reign of Darius II, but he thinks that this is the Great Darius.

Why was the account then not contemporary? It stands to reason that neither the Persians nor the Jewish priesthood wanted to advertise the fact that the religion had been set up by the Persians. The Persians said that they were merely "restoring" the Jewish religion and applying the proper law that Josiah had already discovered and applied 200 years before. Moreover, in the years intervening from the fifth century to the second century, the Jewish priests in cahoots with the Ptolemaic priests and royalty of Egypt had been remoulding the religion to put Jewish origins in Egypt. Even if there had been some document explaining Ezra's mission, it would have been suppressed. Moses had been invented as the Egyptian Ezra. RIP, Ezra!

Garbini's hypothesis about Ezra is that he is the personification of the word "azarah" meaning, in identifiably late biblical books and the writings of the Rabbis, the inner court of the temple. Such explanations suffer from the "chicken and egg syndrome". The wall under consideration could well have represented the original Persian religion which was neurotic about keeping apart the good creation and the wicked creation, in their fight against Ahriman. Thus the wall to separate the priesthood might have been associated with Ezra from the outset, because Persian priests had to take scrupulous care to remain "clean", and therefore to avoid contact with anything potentially unclean like people. The Essenes, who derived from the Hasids, kept up this extreme of separation right into the time of Jesus.

Another chicken and egg problem is Garbini's observation from the *Babylonian Talmud* (*Baba Qamma* 82a) that Ezra made ten ordinances. Garbini sees this as copying Moses, but who is to positively deny that the original ten commandments were not Ezra's, and copied by the Egyptian priests who devised Moses and the exodus? The association of Ezra with the law has to be simply dismissed on Garbini's theory. It was a mistake for his prescribing a canon of religious books! In evidence, Garbini cites the *Apocalypse of Ezra* dated to about 100 AD! There is no denying that the Ezra of Garbini's hypothesis followed the myth of Moses by about 100 years. Why then would any Jews be inventing a man who had to read out the law because Jews had forgotten it? It is far fetched to imagine that another Moses could have been invented only a hundred years after the original and set in competition with him. Unlikely stories, ones that seem to run contrary to the trend of history, have to be taken seriously, so it seems more likely, considering all the evidence that Judaism is Persian, that Ezra is a historical character, even though his memory has been tried to be expunged.

Bearing this in mind, Garbini is quite possibly correct in his theory about factionalism, but it was a factionalism that involved the Puritans of the Persian form of the religion, many of whom still lived in Babylon and Syria and called themselves Hasids (Kasdim, Chaldaeans), and the establishment of Graeco-Egyptian Hellenized priests, who eventually became Sadducees. It was all about the time of the Maccabees, when the rebels promised a return to pure ways of worship, inviting the support of the Hasids, but in fact sought the practical support of the Egyptians and the Romans against the Seleucid Greek kings of Syria.

The original *Ezra* is *1 Esdras*, the mythical basis for the second century reform. Ezra was never known as a Jewish name before the composition of *1 Esdras*, according to Garbini. It is rationalised as "He is help", "He" being God, a bit demeaning to the old finger stirrer for a Jew, one might think. When God is written in explicitly, the outcome is Azariah or Jehoazar and Joazar.

The reform was to allow the priests to mingle with the Israelites—even women—in the court before the temple where they had always previously been separated. This reform was advocated by a faction called the "sons of Aaron" and opposed by the "sons of Zadok". The "sons of Aaron" were Pharisees, or supported by them, and the "sons of Zadok" were Sadducees and Essenes, in Garbini's view.

One wonders whether Garbini has identified the factions correctly. Pharisee is thought by some to mean Persian (cf Parsi), and some see the Hasidim as later splitting into the factions of Pharisees and Essenes. There is no doubt though that Essenes considered themselves Zadokites, and that seems to be the meaning of Sadducees. The whole period is obscure in respect of these factions.

The Persians, it seems, set up the temple state of Jerusalem as a nation of priests, and assuming that the whole nation could not literally have been priests, the reference must have been to the colonists, who formed the ruling class of priests. The locals who were the Am ha Eretz were excluded. By the second century, 300 years on, one could imagine that some of the people objected that the nation as a whole were not priests, and indeed were separated from them. This must have seemed like a gross injustice, and violation of what seemed to have been the Persian intention. Perhaps, at this point the left wing faction formed itself into Pharisees, who believed they were defending the spirit of the Persian reform of Ezra by desegregating priests and people in the temple court. The factions that still defended the segregation were actually upholding what the Persians had instituted, so Pharisee was a misnomer, but it explains why the Pharisees became the people's party. The priestly party were the traditionalists who called themselves Zadokites, imagining that the Zadokite priesthood were the proper

priesthood of the temple, and embodying that in their text called *Ezekiel*. Plainly these Zadokites themselves eventually split, over proper sacerdotal practice in the temple, into Sadducees and Essenes.

The sons of Zadok of *Ezekiel* 40-48, Garbini considers to be the traditional pro-separation party, and the sons of Aaron the desegregationist party of the people, spoken for briefly in *Chronicles*. The Aaronites expelled the Zadokites from power in this view, and started a polemic against their opponents, who complained in return in the *Damascus Document*.

They justified the wicked and condemned the just, and transgressed the Covenant, and violated the Precept. They banded together against the life of the righteous and loathed all who walked in perfection.  
QD 1:19-20

More explicitly, they set about...

...abolishing the ways of righteousness and removing the boundary with which our forefathers had marked out their inheritance.  
QD 1:16; 5:20; 19:15

Moreover, they profane the temple because they do not observe the distinction in accordance with the law.  
QD 5:6-7

They have not kept apart from the people and their sin.  
QD 8:8, 19-20

Unfortunately, the same polemic reiterates *Ezekiel* 13:10 to denote false prophets who have deluded the people—"builders of the wall" (QD 4:19; 19:31) and "builders of the wall and daubers of whitewash" (QD 8:12; 19:24-25). So, says Garbini, though this seems a perverse use of an expression what could have been precisely used of their own stance, *Ezekiel* says false prophets build walls, but the Zadokites believed in walls, not their opponents. We have to convince ourselves here that false prophets are building metaphorical walls not real ones despite the daubing of them with mortar. The general belief is that these metaphorical walls are walls built to prevent inadvertant violation of the law. It is the Pharisaic oral law.

Notwithstanding this problem, breaking the wall offended those priests who called themselves Zadokites causing them to abandon the now desecrated temple, and even Jerusalem, to go live in the wilderness of Judaea, apparently at Qumran. They were called, by Josephus, Essenes. B Z Wacholder, using Ya'aqub al Qirgisani, identifies Zadok, the disciple of Antigonus of Socoh, as the founder of the Essenes, though Qirgisani actually says he founded the Sadducees, along with Boethus, the Egyptian. This Zadok died about 170 BC, but the open differences only started with the act of the High Priest Alcimus (1 Macc 9:54-56; 159 BC).

Garbini identifies the reform with this action of Alcimus, who actually pulled down the dividing wall, and when Herod rebuilt the temple another hundred years later, there was no wall here in the temple forecourt. Even so, Rabbinic sources speak of the "entrance" to the court of the priests marked by a dais. There was only a single court, but the ditinction was retained by the priestly court being paved whereas the court of the people was not. The Rabbis have a direct record of the wall being pulled down:

On the twenty third of Marheshwan, the dividing wall of the inner court was broken down.

*Megillat Taanit*

This marked the beginning of the Essenes Qumran community, matching the archaeological evidence. When Demetrius was summoned to Jerusalem by the “men of lies” (Garbini thinks a summary of *1 Macc* 7:1-25), Alcimus is identified as the “man of lies” who opposed the teacher of righteousness, and he is associated with “the assembly of those who persue lies and are at Jerusalem”, and “the assembly of the arrogant who stand at Jerusalem”.

The Maccabees also opposed the demolition of the wall but later the sons of Zadok fell out with them when they did not resort to the Zadokites but kept the priesthood for themselves. Thus the common belief that Jonathan Maccabee was the wicked priest might also be true. Because the Zadokites fell out with the Maccabees, there is no copy of the Hebrew original of *1 Maccabees* at Qumran. Interestingly, Garbini notes that no copies of *Ezra* or *Chronicles* were found either and that reports that they had have never been substantiated.

Despite all this, Garbini says the *Temple Scroll* is the law read out by the supposedly fictional Ezra. The account of Ezra is all myth but not the law he read out! Even so, the *Temple Scroll* does provide for the separation of Israel from its priests. Nor does it use “azarah” for court. Garbini is not convincing enough overall but he seems to be on to something.

## **The Root ZR (SR)**

A glance at a list of the names of Hebrew monarchs shows no occurrences of ZR or SR except that Uzziah was sometimes also called Azariah. (Remember that written Hebrew had no vowels.) Look though at a list of Assyrian kings and ZR and SR appear often, a reflexion of the name of the national god, SR (Assur). It also appears often in the Babylonian king lists, presumably through Assyrian influence. Yet, the root ZR occurs surprisingly often in certain books of scripture. The Hebrew meaning is given as “help” but this merely justifies it being applied to the priestly class of God’s “helpers”, notably those helping to set up the temple and its new god.

Azur, Ashur or Assur appears (*1 Chr* 2:24;4:5; *Jer* 28:1; *Ezek* 11:1; *Neh* 10:17), and Sara (Sarah, Sarai) was the wife of Abraham, the mythical first “returner”, Asshur was the grandson of Noah (*Gen* 10:11,22) but the Asshurim are the descendants of Dedan, Abraham’s grandson (*Gen* 25:3).

Asher was the eighth son of Jacob by Zilpah, Leah’s handmaid (*Gen* 30:13). Asher was thus the father of one of the tribes, but little more is said about it in the scriptures, except that it was a large tribe at one time and that they dwelt in prosperity among the Phœnicians (*Num* 1:22-41). Yet supposedly at the time of David, it had become too insignificant to list. The tribe of Asher meant, to judge by this description, the Assyrians. Asher offered no heroes for Israel. Anna in the *New Testament* was supposed to have been of the tribe of Aser, proving that she is a fiction for gentile consumption (*Lk* 2:36-38).

The central example is the name Ezra—“the priest and ready scribe in the law of Moses” (*Ezra* 7:6). Ezra was the son of Seraiah (*2 Kings* 25:18-21) itself an example of ZR but modified into SR, and grandson of Azariah,



another example. Also in his genealogy were another Azariah, a Zerahiah and an Eleazar. Lord Arthur C Hervey, the Rector of Ickworth with Horringer, long ago wrote in *William Smith's Dictionary of the Bible* that Azariah, a common name of Hebrew priests is "often confounded with Ezra as well as Zerahiah and Seraiah", but he offers no further comment or explanation. The sounds of Z, TZ, S and SH were either not clearly distinguished in writing, or they varied from place to place, as they still do.

One or other of the Persian kings called Artaxerxes (the X is pronounced KSH) commissioned Ezra to "return" to Yehud with material and money to build a temple. The Persian edict is given in *Ezra* 7. On arrival he found that previous "returners" had not followed the law of the "God of Heaven" and the "law of the king" and had married out of the religion—forbidden in Zoroastrianism. Ezra made them reject Canaanite wives—wives who were not worshippers of Yehouah. Thirteen years later Ezra again returned to read the full book of Moses to the people at the Feast of Booths. This was the start of Judaism, and ZR featured symbolically when Moses caught his distant sight of the Promised Land.

Now beside this famous Ezra, another Ezra apparently "returned" with the first "returners", Zerubabel and Joshua (*Neh* 12:1), and another appears briefly in *1 Chronicles* 4:17.

Another form of Ezra is Ezer which appears in names like Ebenezer, and is common in Assyrian names, suggesting that the returners came from Assyria. In the scriptures, Sharezer is an Assyrian prince who murdered his father, Sennacherib, the Assyrian king (*2 Kings* 19:37; *Isa* 37:38). (Another Sharezer appears in *Zechariah* 7:2.) The Assyrians had already profoundly influenced the Persians in the several hundred years they were migrating from the Caucasus to Fars. In this time they were on or within the eastern boundaries of Assyria, and probably served as soldiers in the Assyrian armies. The Persian god, Ahuramazda, came to be depicted much as the Assyrian God, Assur, had been. Ahura seems to be a word related to Ashur via the word "asura", an Indo-European word for a sun god, perhaps transmitted by the Indo-European Mitanni. The fact that ZR has connotations of fertility also shows it is related to the sun.

That ZR was the name of a god is shown by the appearance of a place in the scriptures called Beth-Zur (*Josh* 15:58) whose inhabitants helped Nehemiah build the walls of Jerusalem (*Neh* 3:16)! Beth means "house" but in place names, the only house worthy of mention is that of the local god. So Beth-Zur is "the House of the God Assur".

Ezer appears twice in *Nehemiah*, as a priest (*Neh* 12:42) and as a son of Jeshua (*Neh* 3:19). Three more instances appear in *1 Chronicles* (*1 Chr* 4:4; 7:21; 12:9) and one in *Genesis* (36:21). An Ezri pops up in *1 Chronicles* 27:26. The "Chronicler", of course, stands for the school that wrote the two books of *Chronicles*, *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*.

The Ezrahites (also called the Zarathites, Zarhites and Izrahites), were a whole family of Ezras whose founding father was Zara (Zarah, Zerah) of the tribe of Yehudim (*1 Chr* 2:6). Zara was the younger of the twin sons of Judah and Tamar, the other being Perez (Pharez). Judah was born in Haran. The linking of Zara with Perez is plainly not coincidental, because Perez obviously stands for Persian in this context, as does Parosh. Peres means Persian in *Daniel* 5:28 where it means the Persian empire as successor to the Babylonian empire.

Zarathites are among the "returners" (*Neh* 11:24), and so are the descendants of Parosh (*Ezra* 2:3; *Neh* 7:8)

and another such man (*Ezra* 8:3). A Parosh helped to build the wall (*Neh* 3:25) and the Paroshes were a family that sealed the covenant with Nehemiah (*Neh* 10:14). The family Perez proved to be an important group in Judah, being also called the Pharez, linking it directly with the appropriate pronunciation (Fars).

Zerah as it normally appears with its derivatives appears in the story of Esther, a manifestly Persian story that identifies the normal cases of ZR to be from the Persian Period. Zerah is the wife of Haman who advised him to set up a cross to crucify Mordecai but realized, when Mordecai was revealed as a Jew, that Haman would suffer that fate himself.

Zerubabel (Zorobabel in *Matthew*), conventionally, was the first Persian administrator to return, supposedly in the first year of Cyrus. Nehemiah is declared as Tirshatha (*Neh* 8:9;10:10), a governor below the rank of Satrap, and the priest is Ezra. Zerubabel must have had this title (*Ezra* 2:63; *Neh* 7:65,70) because he was not the priest, who was Jeshua, and yet was plainly in charge, so he was a Persian official and not simply a Jewish volunteer. Jeshua means “saviour” and Cyrus presented himself as the saviour of his conquered peoples, freely giving important appointees among his subjects this title as a reminder to them.

In this story, Zerubabel was not a success because the building work ceased for 16 years, presumably through opposition from the Am ha-Eretz, the native Israelites who were not allowed to participate in setting up the temple—not surprisingly because it was a temple to a god unfamiliar to the natives. Following the criticisms of Haggai and Zechariah the work was resumed and supposedly finished in the sixth year of Darius, about twenty years after the original edict.

There are other Zaras, Zeruahs, Zeruiahs, Zorahs or Zohars as it sometimes becomes (*Gen* 36:13,17;45:10; *1 Chr* 1:37; 4:7,34; 6:31; 25:3,11; *Neh* 11:29; *1 Sam* 9:1;26:6; *1 Kings* 11:26). Zorah or Zoreah was the home of the hero Samson, an old sun god demoted to the level of a Jewish hero. It is still called Surah and is near the wadi Surar.

Curiously the word “zar” appears in Hebrew meaning an outsider. To the Am ha-Eretz, that is exactly what the “returners” were. Perhaps they used the “returners” own distinct word as a pejorative reference to them meaning foreigners, but by the time the two opposed groups had integrated a hundred years later, it simply meant a stranger in general.

## **ZR as a Priestly Title**

The place where the Israelites entered the Promised Land by crossing the Jordan river was Zaretan (*Josh* 3:16), apparently the same place as Zartanah (*1 Kg* 4:12), Zarthan (*1 Kg* 7:46), Zaredah or Zeredathah (*2 Chr* 4:17) and Zerarah (*Jg* 7:22). Another Persian sounding place was Zereth-Shaher (*Josh* 3:19), a place near the Dead Sea. Nearby, if it was not the same place, was Zoar where Lot’s family took shelter. It was also noted as the place seen by Moses from Pisgah as a landmark in the Promised Land (*Gen* 13:10;19:22-23,30; *Dt* 34:3; *Isa* 15:5; *Jer* 48:34). Before it was given this new religious name, it had a previous religious name under the Canaanites, Bela (Baal) or Bel-el. It must have been a Canaanite shrine taken over by the “returners”.

The root ZR is combined in many names with El or Iah (Yeho) as in Azarael (*Neh* 12:36), a Levite musician,

Azareel or Azarel (*Ezra* 10:41), a son of Bani who rejected his Canaanite wife as Ezra demanded, and the father of a “returner” who was another priest (*Neh* 11:13). Three others had the same name in *Chronicles* (*1 Chr* 12:6;25:18;27:22). Azarael is the same name as Eleazar with the two parts reversed. Azariah is a popular name in the descendants of Eleazar, showing that the original name favoured for the god of the “returners” was El, then it became Yehouah.

Azariah means “Our God is Yehouah”, taking ZR to mean god, from the Assyrian—or more directly, “Assur is Yehouah!” Interestingly, the very name, Israel, can be read in the same way as “Assur is El” or as “Our god is El”. Azariah was a favourite name for priests suggesting it was a priestly title or dynasty. The High Priest, Azariah was the grandson of Zadok. He supposedly officiated at the consecration of Solomon’s temple and was the first High Priest to serve in it. Zadok was the mythical founder priest of Jewish temple worship, and supposed founder of the dynasty of priests.

Azariah was the name of High Priests in the reigns of Abijah and Asa (*1 Chr* 6:10,11) and Uzziah (*2 Chr* 26:17-20). Azariah resisted the priestly ambitions of Uzziah (also called Azariah) who was blighted with leprosy for his presumption, a warning by the Persians against any ambitious local princes. An Azariah was High Priest in the time of Hezekiah (*2 Chr* 31:10-13). His concern was to find room in the temple to store the tithes and offerings made to the priests and Levites. Without them to support their comfortable lifestyle, the implication is that the House of God would be forsaken (*Neh*10:35-39).

An Azariah actually accompanied Zerubabel from Mesopotamia (*Neh* 7:7), but in *Ezra* 2:2, the same man is called Seraiah, showing the equivalence of these names and Z with S, just as they are in the Babylonian king lists. Another Azariah was a priest who restored part of the wall (*Neh* 3:23-24), and another was a Levite who, with Ezra, taught the people the law of Moses (*Neh* 8:7).

Yet more priests were called Azariah. One sealed the covenant with Nehemiah (*Neh* 10:2) and helped in the dedication of the city wall (*Neh* 12:33), unless this was yet another one. Another was an Officer of Solomon, (*1 Kg* 4:5), another a son of Jehoshaphat (*2 Chr* 21:2), another a captain of Judah in the time of Ataliah (*2 Chr* 23:1), another a captain of Ephraim in the days of Ahaz who sent back the captives and spoil taken by Pekah in the invasion of Judah.

Abednego in *Daniel* 1, who refused to countenance idolatry and was thrown into the fiery furnace, was first called Azariah. Another Azariah was a prophet in the time of king Asa. He too was opposed to idolatry and persuaded the people of Judah and Benjamin to reject it and set up an altar to Yehouah before the porch of the temple, perhaps the occasion when the change was made from El to Yehouah because many of the converts were Israelites not apostatizing Jews, and the scale of the festivities was immense (*2 Chr* 15).

Azriel appears twice as the head of families (*1 Chr* 5:24;27:19) and also as the father of Seraiah, an officer of Jehoakim (*Jer* 36:26), showing once more Yehouah supplanting El. Asarael or Asarel and Asharelah or Jesharelah are other variants (*1 Chr* 4:16; 25:2,14). Several Azrikams appear mainly in *Chronicles* (*1 Chr* 3:23;8:38;9:14; *2 Chr* 28:7; *Neh* 11:5). Izri, also called Zeri, is a Levite in the temple (*1 Chr* 25:11).

Seraiah is a scribe (*2 Sam* 8:17), a chief priest at Jerusalem (*2 Kg* 25:18; *1 Chr* 6:14; *Ezra* 7:1; *Jer* 52:24), a

priest who “returned” with Zerubabel (*Ezra* 2:2; *Neh* 10:2; 12:1,12), also called Azariah (*Neh* 7:7), the “ruler of the House of God” after the “return” (*Neh* 11:11), a messenger of Jeremiah (*Jer* 51:59-61), and lesser known ones appear often (*2 Kg* 25:23; *Jer* 36:26; 40:8; *1 Chr* 4:13-14; 4:35). Sered also occurs (*Gen* 46:14; *Num* 26:26).

Baal-Perazim was supposedly named by David when he defeated the Philistines and burnt their idols. So, here the true god is called Baal. Perazim means Persians so the rededicated shrine is to the “Lord of the Persians”! The Lord of the Persians in heaven was the God of Heaven, Ahuramazda, and the Lord of the Persians on earth was the Shahanshah, the King of Kings. Angels are considered to be a Persian idea originally and the name of one of the types of angels is Seraphim!

Sherai and Shashai were sons of Bani in *Ezra* 10:40, and Bani is another Assyrian name, appearing in the king lists. Sherebiah was another Levite among the “returners” with Ezra who taught the new law to the people and sealed the covenant (*Ezra* 8:18,24; *Neh* 8:7; 9:4-5; 10:12; 12:8,24).

Sur was the name of a gate in Jerusalem called “the Gate of the Foundation” suggesting it was associated with the beginnings of the temple and its cult by the “returners” (*2 Kg* 11:6; *2 Chr* 23:5).

Several words appear like Jezreel, often taken as an alternative form of Israel, and Joash, a name that cannot be interpreted, is probably an abbreviated form of Joasher (“Yehouah is Assur”).

A case of ZR that seems not to come from the same immediate source as the others is the Zerah whose army of a million(!) men was defeated by king Asa. Zirrah is a known title of the Sabaeen Arab princes and this prince seems likely to have been an Arab.

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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 3. Ezra & The Law

## Haggai and Zerubabel: Was Zerubabel Zoroaster?

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### Haggai

Haggai and Zechariah are mentioned in *Ezra* 5:1 prophesying to the Jews and urging the temple to be rebuilt (*Ezra* 6:14). *Haggai* 2:6-9 “prophesies” the setting up of the temple state with gold and silver provided!

After Cyrus (Koresh), the founder of the Persian empire, had issued edicts that captives could be returned, and furnished the Jews with the necessities for restoring the temple (*2 Chr* 36:23; *Ezra* 1:1; 2:2), Haggai supposedly “returned” under Zerubabel and Joshua, the high priest, in 536 BC. Peter Ross Bedford does not trust *Ezra* 1-6 because it is “tendentious, inconsistent and historically inaccurate”, a perfect description of most of the bible. He says the rededication of the temple’s altar and the re-laying of its foundations (*Ezra* 2:68-3:18; 5:16) should be dated to the time of Darius I even though it is made to seem to be in the reign of Cyrus. Indeed, many scholars think:

1. no Jewish exiles returned in the time of Cyrus,
2. no one tried to build the temple before 520 BC.

Why 520 BC? On the first day of the sixth month of the second year of Darius—the festival of a new moon—Haggai brought the word of the Lord (*Hag* 1:1), a command to build the temple. The date of Haggai is taken to be the second year of Darius, from its own dating. The Aramaic text of *Ezra* agrees with *Haggai* and *Zechariah* that the new temple was started in the second year of Darius, under the leadership of Joshua and Zerubabel. This Darius is always assumed to be the one surnamed “the Great”, Darius I, but it is because the later scribes who edited the works they compiled in *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, had no idea there were different Persian kings with the same name. Darius I began to rule in 522 BC, and so the prophesy of Haggai, and the “return” was therefore 520 BC. Sixteen mysterious years seem to have passed since 536 BC with nothing happening.

The people left in the land, the Am ha Eretz, whom *Ezekiel* charges with idolatry, from the outset claimed a right to the land they had lived in since the Babylonian deportation, though many had avoided the ruined city of Jerusalem. They therefore resisted the plans of the Jews, the Persian colonials. *Ezra* says the “returners” were intimidated by the locals from building, and hired counsellors against them “all the days of Cyrus, even until the reign of Darius”. Again the story gets confused, for the authors of it knew only of the Great Darius, and did not realize that the temple was not actually completed until the reign of Darius II, a hundred years later. Not knowing this, the whole of the action before Haggai had to have happened in the reign of Cyrus, from 538 to 530 BC, the scriptures seemingly knowing nothing about Cambyses (530-522 BC). Darius II reigned from 423 to 405 BC, so there was plenty of time from the edict of Cyrus to the sixth year of Darius II for early returners to attempt some unsuccessful reconstruction and annoy the natives.

If Persian colonists had arrived earlier, they had not had the same brief as those who came with Ezra and Nehemiah. What seems to be hidden in the failure of the earlier “returners” to build the temple is that they knew

nothing about building a single sanctuary—a temple. They seem to have built shrines in various places, if not to a variety of Canaanite gods. This might be the blurred meaning of them building luxurious homes with panels or roofs! They were not their own homes but the “houses” of a variety of gods.

Rebellions of Egypt occurred in 486-483 BC and 464-454 BC. A further rebellion in 405 BC led to a long secession from the Persian empire until it was recaptured in 342 BC, only a decade before the Persian empire collapsed to Alexander. If some of the locals had supported the Egyptians or Megabyxos in their rebellions in the middle of the fifth century BC, the purpose of fortifying Jerusalem after 150 years would have been to keep the rebels under control, and act as a watchtower against Egypt. It was the urgent reason why Nehemiah and Ezra were despatched.

Opposition by Samaritans might have been exaggerated by the later chroniclers as an excuse why the temple had not been built sooner. They wrote that the locals claimed the project was illegal, and, in response to Samaritan—Israelite!—complaints, it was stopped again. The Samaritans who had worshipped Yehouah since the days of the Assyrian king, Esarhaddon, thought they had an equal, if not greater, right to the building of the temple to Yehouah. The Samaritans, the native Canaanites that had remained in the northern Palestinian Hills—the Samaritans were a later religious sect formed out of their frustration—no doubt complained about the settlers coming in and acting superior, but since the Persian king had approved it, they were only going to hear consoling noises from Persian ministers. The project was obviously not forbidden and any apparent halts in response to Samaritan pleas could only have been diplomatic gestures.

The host of people listed in *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* as “returners” cannot have arrived all at once as they claimed, or before all this happened, because such a crowd could have outfaced the complaining locals. Even at this stage, only a small number could have arrived, the few who had already come before Nehemiah and Ezra, and the few more who came with them. *Haggai* says nothing about the exile, nor do *Haggai* and *Zechariah* speak of a “return”. They do not call the builders of the temple “golah” or “bene haggolah”, “captivity” or “sons of the captivity”, the names that would be used by the Persian colonists of themselves. They are simply “this people”, or “remnant of the people”. *Ezra* refers to the “golah” not as captives in Babylon but captives in Yehud. Yehud is not a kingdom but a colony. The system was planned in Persian Babylon. The colonists came from Babylon to found not a kingdom but a theocracy—a church, to impose God’s will, meaning that of God’s earthly agent, the Shahanshah, on the people. Their life, for centuries, would be subject to priestly government and ideals. Righteousness was obedience to the law, an idea that Jews eventually passed on to the Moslems.

The dates of Haggai’s four distinct prophecies are given with apparent accuracy, though the style of them betrays that they are the addition of the same redacter as books like *Ezra*:

1. On the first day of the sixth month of the second year of Darius (*Hag* 1:1-15), Haggai reproved the people for their apathy in allowing God’s house to be desolate, and reminded them of their ill success in everything because of their not honoring God as to His house. Twenty-four days afterwards they commenced building (*Hag* 1:12-15).
2. On the twenty-first day of the seventh month (*Hag* 2:1-9), Haggai predicts that “the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former”. The glory would be measured in gold and silver (*Hag* 2:8), the “desirable things”, properly “treasure”, of all nations (*Hag* 2:7). The reason for this assurance is that this house was (*Hag* 2:3) in their eyes “as nothing”. In short, nothing was there—there was nothing to see!



Haggai's question, "Who among you is left that saw this House in its former glory?", implies that no one was left that had! The question implies there had been a formerly glorious temple, but no one knew, and nothing was left of it! None of the thousands of biblical commentators observe on this simple fact because they all are convinced that there are ruins of Solomon's temple before their eyes. Haggai says there is nothing.

3. On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (*Hag* 2:10-19), God promises His blessing, but to the priests not to "this nation before me", which is unclean.
4. On the same day as the preceding (*Hag* 2:20-23), Haggai addressed Zerubabel, the governor, and prophesied he would be the "chosen one" of God, apparently indicating a rebellion.

*Haggai* 2:15 says that "not one stone was set on another" when the construction began, certainly in the time of Darius II, showing that if any altar had earlier been sanctified, no structure had accompanied it. The Persians of the time of Cyrus worshipped in the open air and would not have seen any structure as useful. They believed that Ahuramazda inhabited the universe, not just a house! A temple open to the sky seemed to them most appropriate. A hundred years later, things were quite different. Artaxerxes and Darius were as much Babylonians as Persians, especially the latter whose mother was a Babylonian, and were comfortable about building enclosures as temples.

The name "Haggai" is said to be a shortening of Haggiah meaning a "festivity of Yehouah", supposedly in anticipation of the joyous return from exile. Haggai did not seem a very joyful man, and this is folk etymology. Literally, it looks to mean "The Ravine", which in the Zoroastrian eschatological context in which the book ends, reminds us of the Abyss of Judgement, over which is the Chinvat bridge for the passage of righteous souls to heaven (a place associated in later Judaism with the Qidron Valley, the Vale of Jehoshaphat).

Joshua means "Saviour of Yehouah" and is one of those titles conquerors gave to puppets they placed in charge of their conquests. The Assyrians and Persians presented themselves and their agents as saviours of the conquered people. The Persians evidently appointed Zerubabel ("son of Babylon" or "Might of Babylon") and Joshua as High Priest to rule the temple colony. Joshua is the son of Jehozadak (Josedeck) meaning the "Righteous One of Yehouah", probably another title of Joshua rather than his father, but transmuted into his father by the compilers of the genealogies at a later date.

Zerubabel is described as the governor (*pehah*), using an Aramaic word derived from the Persian "*basha*", (Turkish, *Pasha*). Here we will have the origin of the later preoccupation of apocalyptists in Judah—the trinity of the prophet, prince and priest, Haggai, Zerubabel and Joshua.

"Zeru" is the same word as the "Zoro" of Zoroaster, or the "Zara" of Zarathustra, and the same also as Ezra. Ezra came from Babylon with the authority of the Persian chancellery, so he looks suspiciously like Zerubabel, the "son" or "might of Babylon". If Ezra is the son of Babylon, but the city's name has been suppressed, he is simply "the son". Curious then that Moses, in its Egyptian interpretation, is also just "the son", the name of the father (as in Rameses) having been suppressed in this etymology. Both Moses and Ezra are therefore simply "the son" to the chroniclers, and they will have assumed both were "the son of Yehouah", but at a time when it had become pious not to speak the holy name. So they will have assumed it had dropped from the proper name of these holy men to the scribes for purely pious reasons. In fact, the full theophoric name that is missing in these two cases appear often in the scriptures as Messiah, the apocalyptic son of God, Joezar and Azariah, the

latter being unquestionably a priest's name above all. More important is that both of these "sons" gave the Jews their law, but Moses did it, in the scriptural myth no less than a thousand years before Ezra did!

## **Zechariah 1-8**

Haggai apparently preceded Zechariah by two months ("the eighth month", *Zech* 1:1).

*Zechariah* makes almost no reference to building a temple, and none of the visions are concerned with it. Allusions are to Yehouah being in the city, but the temple is unrecognized. The purpose seems to be to encourage people as colonists, and the book is concerned with them and how they will behave when they are placed in their new home. The verses at the beginning of *Zechariah* give the basis of the myth of a "return" from "exile". The "return" is repeatedly referred to as a "return to God". The word "return" appears three times, one of them being a promise that God would return to them in exchange for their return to him.

Peter Marinkovic has noted that "house" can mean descendants or a building, and allusions to the building of a community were always intended where "the House of God" was read as the temple. In *2 Samuel* 7 (1 *Chr* 17), the two meanings are used in teasing interplay. God does not want a house (temple) but will build a house (dynasty) for David. The author of Mark has Jesus doing the same (*Mk* 3:20f), punning on "house" in the title of the Philistine God (Baalzebub, "Lord of the House"). The Essenes and Jesus at a much later date saw their respective communities ("*yahad*") as being the proper temple. We use the word "church" in an identically ambiguous way. It can be a building for worship or the community that uses the building, or just a community of worshippers in general.

Most of the people deported to the hills of Palestine will have known that they were not "exiles" "returning" as the Persian propaganda made out. But they had no choice and would be at least the ruling class of the colony. They will have known that their task was to build up a temple state for the province of Abarnahara and that they would therefore be wealthy if they did their job well. So all the metaphorical "returning", they will have known, was to be their own angle on the local populations.

In the Palestinian hills the people were worshippers of the Canaanite high god, El—they were the seed or the sons of El, the Israelites. Among El's court was one of his sons, a god called Yehou (Yehouah), so the local people had no need to return to him, he had always been available to them as one of their Baals or Lords. The colonists were instructed to teach the natives that they had not been worshipping properly. They, the "captives", the "remnant", had kept the correct worship and the natives had to return to it to get any economic benefits.

## **Visions**

Zechariah offers them some visions rather like those of *Daniel* and *Revelation* at later dates, though both are in the tradition of the *Enoch* literature that might have its origins in the early disputes of the temple state of Yehud. The horses and horsemen in the first vision (*Zech* 1:7-17) suggest the habit of Persian kings later than Cyrus and Darius. From Artaxerxes I, the Persian kings reintroduced Mithras and Anahita, so instead of leading their armies with an empty chariot standing for Ahuramazda, there were three chariots for the gods as well as that of the king.

In the first vision, the “Angel of the Lord” is distinct from the other three, but the three stand for the three Persian Gods that have spread peace (“rest”). The Angel of the Lord is the visible face of the Jewish God, whose archetype is Ahuramazda, so appears twice, once in each role. Those who patrol the earth in Persian religion are the attributes of God, the six (or seven) Amesha Spentas, but here seem to have been identified with the three great gods of the Persians, unless the four who appear in the eighth vision are meant to complete the seven. Seven is the magic number that divides into the heavenly three and the earthly four.

If the earth was “at rest”, the rebellions of the start of the reign of Darius I are over. Since the Darius used for dating purposes is always taken to be Darius I, this seems sensible, but almost every new Persian king was greeted by rebellions. The uncertainty of a change of king was the ideal time for dissatisfied subject nations to try to assert themselves, and they did—most notably the Egyptians. Darius II had trouble at the start of his reign too, so the apparent agreement here with the better known troubles of Darius I might easily be spurious. In either case, the promise is that Jerusalem would be restored. The prophet is urging the people not to join any rebellions, and be rewarded.

A red horse, or a chariot decorated with red livery was the colour of Anahita, who was the goddess of warfare among other things. Ahuramazda and Mithras had white horses. One would imagine the “Angel of the Lord” ought to be on a white horse, but the Jewish imagery seems to have been of peace imposed after war, and so God mounted on a red horse, as a God of war, was more appropriate. Bribery and threat appear again in the prophecy, the threat that God would be angry with nations that perpetuated the disaster, that being the current rebellion, while the praise is prosperity for the city.

The vision of the horns (*Zech* 1:18-21) makes little sense in the supposed context. The horns purport to be the kings or nations that have oppressed Jerusalem in the past, but only two spring to mind, the Assyrians who were happy to extract tribute, and the Babylonians who sacked the city. At a later date the Persians and Greeks could have been added, so this might be a pseudepigraph interpolated at a later date, or a result of later redaction to make the work seem prophetic. Then the date of composition, or editing, would be most suitably in the Hasmonaeen period, when all four horns had been “cut down” (*Zech* 1:21), and by “smiths” if the nickname of Hasmonaeans as the Maccabees—hammers—is to be understood that way. There were six Maccabees in the generations that fought for independence, the father and five sons, but only four of them ruled—Mattathias, Judas, Jonathan and Simon.

The third vision (*Zech* 2:1-5) suggests Jerusalem will not need walls, so is hardly an inducement to build them. In the sense that the nation would become independent and defend itself militarily rather than passively as a walled city, this also came true at the time of the Maccabees. Then follows a song (*Zech* 2:6-12) urging people to return from the land of the north—Babylon because the “return” to the Judaeen hills is from the north. It sounds appropriate, but is certainly an addition at the time the Maccabees declared UDI and wanted Jews to return to help their struggle.

## **Zerubabel and Joshua**

*Zechariah* 3 and 4 are concerned with the two leaders, one assumed to be a priest, and the other the king, though the texts do not say this. Joshua is the High Priest, but later on seems to be crowned as a king, but otherwise Zerubabel, who is the Persian governor, is supposed to be the prospective king. The Persians would

not have tolerated a king, but they might have been willing for their propagandists to give the impression to the colonists that a kingdom would have been the outcome in time.

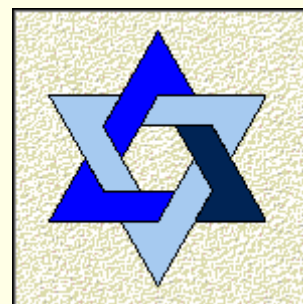
The fourth vision (*Zech 3:1-10*) is of a coronation ceremony involving Joshua, the High Priest. The purpose of the ceremony seems to be to stand for the removal of the iniquity of the land. Joshua, the salvation of the colonists, is shown as accused of some wrong and dressed in filthy old garments seeming to represent this. It is an adaptation of the renewal ceremony of the Persian king at the New Year festival. The king dresses down as the Old Year, now in tatters, but in the course of the ceremony his rags are removed and replaced by bright finery as the New Year, a ritual that also stood for the Creation because God turned Chaos into Order. In Persian religion, every new year was a new creation, and the king had to be crowned anew. In the ceremony, Joshua is crowned, not with a “turban” but with a “mitre”, the Mithraic head dress still worn by Christian bishops.

Joshua is mentioned five times, twice as the High Priest, but essentially he is symbolic in this vision. Joshua is mentioned only once more in the whole book (*Zech 6:11*), where suddenly he has *become* the eschatological symbol the “Branch!” Yet here, God’s servant “the Branch” is promised *to* Joshua and his companions. A brand is also spoken of as plucked from the fire signifying the possibility of redemption for God’s people from the consuming fire of the End, providing that they are obedient.

Joshua seems to be taking an eschatological role suggesting that a later editor might have done the same as he did to the figure of Zerubabel in Haggai—turned a mythical figure (Zoroaster, the Saoshyant or Saviour) into a historic one, this time Joshua, which means Yehouah’s Saviour. The mention of courts before the temple had even been built, suggests a later addition. Many scholars think the coronation of Joshua is an interpolation, but perhaps a redacter has simply substituted the name Joshua for Zerubabel along with a few minor enhancements. Enoch has been identified as the personification of the New Year, and so possibly Joshua has been substituted here for Enoch, but Enoch is the Jewish Zoroaster, so we link once again to Zerubabel.

The stone with seven facets inscribed with some name sounds like the Star of David, or Solomon’s Seal, but this symbol was not to be associated with Judaism specifically for many centuries. It was a symbol used in the Near East, and it is a perfect symbol of Ahuramazda, with his six Amesha Spentas, the seventh being the Holy Spirit, representing the god himself. The eschatological content in it once more implies that the colonists would be instrumental in defeating wickedness and honoured their salvation.

The fifth vision (*Zech 4:1-14*) is of a lampstand with a bowl, seven lamps, seven wicks and two olive trees. The prophet asks what these are in *Zechariah 4:4* but does not get an answer until *Zechariah 4:10*. The interpolated six verses are the only ones in the whole of *Zechariah* that mention Zerubabel, and in them he is mentioned four times! It looks suspicious. They look like two or three fragments inserted or rather misplaced, because some of the references to Zerubabel seem to mean Zoroaster.



Star of David, a symbol of duality, and Ahuramazda with his six Amesha Spentas

The Lord of Hosts says, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit”, seeming to refer to the meaning of

Zerubabel ("Might of Babylon") and substituting the Holy Spirit instead. The Holy Spirit in Iranian religion was Spenta Mainyu, effectively the god Ahuramazda in his active role, just as the Holy Ghost of Yehouah was. The Saoshyant in the form of an incarnation of Zoroaster, the perfect man, still depended upon the spirit of God for his power. He is still a man, part of God's creation. Nevertheless at the Zoroastrian eschaton, the world would be levelled to a great plain, and here (*Zech* 4:7) in perhaps another fragment is an apparent reference to it, possibly edited in a pointed way to refer to an empire (the Seleucids?). Then Zerubabel is shown as the builder of the temple, complete with plumb line, in a new fragment introduced at verse 4:8. The intention of some editor, perhaps through ignorance, is to show an originally eschatological Zerubabel as the builder of the temple, but these verses are all we get from him about Zerubabel.

The angel's explanation of the lampstand is that the seven lamps are the eyes of God that "run to and fro" through the whole earth. In Zoroastrianism, the seven Amesha Spentas, the spirits of God acted on the world and so ran to and fro through it, but the veiled meaning is that the Persian monarch knows everything through his system of spies, prophets and informers.

The two olive trees might be a hint of ancient tree worship that still existed in Iranian religion at this time. The trees are apparently feeding oil to the lamp and are described as "sons of oil" (not "anointed ones", *Zech* 4:14). The two trees are conventionally identified with Zerubabel and Joshua, but these two are not connected at all by the author of *Zechariah*, the few references to each of them being so highly localized that they cannot be thought of as the subject of the work as a whole. They "stand by the Lord of the whole earth", many will imagine meaning God, but "Lord" here is not "Yehouah" but "Adon", and earth is "Eretz" which equally means "land." The "Lord of the whole earth" was the Persian king, but the "Lord of the Land" might have meant his local agent, the governor or prince. The two sons of oil are therefore his chief assistants, the priest and prophet. Both priests (*Lev* 16:32) and prophets (*Psa* 105:15; *Chrl* 16:22) came to be considered as God's anointed, and this imagery might have been the start of it.

The sixth vision is of a gigantic scroll flying over the land representing a curse against thieves and liars—deception and deceit—truth being the primary concern of the Zoroastrian religion. The scroll suggests the *Book of Life* full of the account of everyone's good and bad deeds that are balanced at the End of Limited Time. Plainly it would therefore be a curse against all of those with an adverse balance. It is apparently a warning that the colonists were expected to be honest.

Immediately we get an image (usually counted as a separate seventh vision) of a woman standing for iniquity, trapped in a grain pot. Two women would return her to Babylon to be placed in her own temple. Here is an attack on the goddess evidently still worshipped by the Canaanites when the colonists were being obliged to "return." The demon of the Lie in Zoroastrian religion was female, and here she is identified with the goddess and carried by women back to a place that suited her. Anahita, the Persian version of Ishtar, was worshipped in Babylon by the time of Darius II.

The eighth image is of chariots with different coloured horses, surely again based on the Persian habit of having ceremonial chariots with distinctive livery for their gods. As in the first vision they are patrolling the earth as the Amesha Spentas did. Those heading towards the north country quieten a spirit there. These chariots had been standing not before God but before the "Lord of the Land", so the impression given is that a favourable message had been sent to Persia thus tempering the Persian king's spirit. The chariot of red horses, representing warfare,

seems not to have been loosed, unless they were the ones that went south, but for a scribal error. It is all abstruse but might suggest that the colonists had been cleared of a suspicion of supporting an Egyptian rebellion. Leaving visions the author seems to recount some history, but the crowning of Joshua (*Zech* 6:9-14) is shown to be a prophecy ("this shall come to pass", *Zech* 6:15) for those who come to build the temple. Furthermore, the allusions to the growing of a sprout or a branch (*Zech* 6:12) seem to be to a pun on the meaning of Zerubabel, taking it to mean "seed of Babylon", and not Joshua, it being a seed that sprouts. The Masoretic bible has "crown" in the plural showing perhaps that later Jews expected a double crowning, presumably Zerubabel and Joshua, but Zerubabel has dropped out. If Zerubabel was Ezra, a Persian minister of religion, he would not have remained in Yehud after the dedication, but would have returned to his broader duties in Babylon. He would therefore have dropped out of the story. The later scribes seem then to have mistaken him, because of the great authority he had, that of the king, as a governor when he was a minister. In *Zechariah* 6:13, Joshua, who is himself supposed to be a priest, will have a priest standing by his throne, implying that he is not. It suggests that some other name has been altered to Joshua. An editor has realized that Zerubabel, already mistaken as the governor, could not have been a king of the Jews and has dropped him in favour of Joshua. The single crown was probably correct but meant Zerubabel, the eschatological saviour. Joshua and Zerubabel might all along have been simply different titles for the Saoshyant.

The remaining two chapters simply urge the lamenting people to regard the feasts as joyful not seasons of lamentation. They are of quite a different tone and, though usually taken as part of the original Zechariah, might not have been. The rest of the book is undoubtedly later, from the Greek period and perhaps the time of the civil war.

## Temple or Treasury?

Was there a second temple in the fifth century? What archaeological remains have been found of it? None! The absence of evidence of it either textually or in the ground suggests it never existed, at least in the form and perhaps the place usually imagined. Joel Weinberg, from the accounts of Haggai and Zechariah, has suggested it was the treasury and commercial centre of a temple community (Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde). Commercial centres in those times were commonly based on temples that acted like modern banks. In *Haggai* 2:15-19, the temple sounds like more like a depository for the collected tithes of Abarnahara! It would provide a new economic base for an otherwise poor area. The fact that the administrators wanted a temple as a treasury did not impress the people until Haggai explained its economic advantages. Robert P Carroll of Glasgow University observes:

It looks more like an imperial taxing centre than a holy house.

The temple was built to function as a treasury and an exchange as well as being a temple. Indeed the temple was really a cover for the main activity of collecting and storing the taxes of the nations of Abarnahara. Since the priests of the temple of Yehouah were really privileged imperial taxation officials they could hardly be expected to be loved, and nor were they. Carroll again notes:

The temple represented in Ezra-Nehemiah is the ideological property and private concern of a pressure group determined to be as exclusive as possible.



This nation of priests collected produce that had to be flawless (without a blemish) for easy sale. Some animals were sacrificed but many were sold to merchants, and the coin used for payments into the imperial treasury. Over 400 years later Jesus chased the merchants out of the temple—but only with a pair of thongs! *Zechariah* 14:21 gives the reason why he did it, the relationship between the clearing out of the merchants and the Day of God's Vengeance.

*Haggai* 2:7 says that Yehouah will “shake” all the nations to bring “riches” into the temple. Yehouah grasps all the gold and silver in the satrapy in verse 2:8 because these riches are to be the real glory of the temple. The “nations” are not all the nations of the world but the nations that constitute the satrapy of Abarnahara, and these verses make it utterly clear that the Jerusalem temple was to be where the gold and silver of the people of that province—the Hebrews—would be collected. Haggai never speaks of the temple being for sacrifice but it is unambiguously to be a local Fort Knox. The prophet is also urgent about the need to build. Abarnahara was not a satrapy when Darius the Great took the throne of Persia—it was part of the satrapy of Babylon—but it was under Darius II. It is unlikely that a temple community would have been set up to collect taxes for Abarnahara until after Abarnahara became a satrapy in its own right.

### **Uncleanness and Holiness**

A curiosity is that the people have to build the temple (*Hag* 1:8;2:4) but are not fit for the job—they are unclean (*Hag* 2:10-14). How can a nation of priests be unclean, and why would unclean people be allowed to build a sacred temple? David J A Clines has noted that a social conflict is lurking barely disguised in the text. It is between the priests and the people. Haggai is addressing two sets of people in his “prophecies” but the extant edition of his utterances has confused the differences.

Haggai, Zerubabel and Joshua represent the Jews, the colonists, although they were hardly of one mind. Those who had been self-indulgent in building themselves luxurious buildings with ceilings or panelled walls were the colonists, of whom there were few, but they were privileged as agents of the Persians. In *Haggai* 1:12 and 2:2, the “remnant” is spoken of, but later in 2:4, “all the people of the land.” The colonists are the “remnant” while the bulk of the people native to the hill country plainly cannot have been thought of as a “remnant.” The people are the native inhabitants, the Am ha Eretz. Naturally these people were not priests and not even practitioners of the proper brand of Yehouism, so were unclean. “Remnant” implies a small number and these were the colonists supposed to be righteous and therefore rewarded for their goodness. They are a parasitic class imposed on to the local people and the prophet urges them to be less lavishes in their self-indulgence and to involve the Am ha Eretz to do their duty and complete the temple.

Clines asks how a people could be unclean. Zoroastrianism, long before Judaism, had a system of clean and unclean animals, and Zoroastrianism could explain this distinction. Judaism never could. Clean animals were of God's Good Creation whereas unclean animals were of the Evil Creation. People were made by God and so were part of the Good Creation, but Zoroastrianism recognizes that some people were beguiled by the Evil Spirits into evil ways, and those foreign people that followed Gods considered “daevas” by the Iranians were such people. They had succumbed to temptation by evil spirits. So far as we can discern from the attitude of Persians to foreigners who worshipped false gods, the Iranians accepted that they could be won back from their error. They were, after all, human and created by the Good Spirit. Persian policy over religion is the expression of this belief in practice. They allowed the worshippers of the “daevas” to repent their error and become one of

the Juddin, worshippers of acceptable gods but not Zoroastrians. If they rebelled however—rebellion being contrary to Arta or good order—they proved they were still controlled by evil spirits and were punished.

Haggai and the priests were Zoroastrians as *Haggai* 2:12-13 shows when they discuss cleanliness and holiness. Using Socratean dialectic before Socrates was born, Haggai has the priests admitting that holiness is not contagious like pollution. It has to be worked for, so the prophet urges the people to get on with building the temple. This is supposedly less than twenty years after the Persian conquest but Zoroastrian ideas of cleanliness are being used as criteria. Protestors that these were Jewish rules set by Moses forget that Moses is a myth for whom there is not a whit of historical evidence, unless he stands for Mazas (Ahuramasda), the Persian God, written in the Semitic way.

If Haggai was a Zoroastrian then he was an official Persian prophet, a man who declared what should happen, to prepare the ground for government policy decisions—an ancient spin doctor. Haggai (*Hag* 1:13) is the “messenger of the Lord.” He, and his fellow prophets are, in fact, the messengers of the king. A Oppenheim sees the imagery of Zechariah’s “eyes of the Lord” (Zech 4:10) as reflecting the Persian spying system of “informers, accusers, internal spies, censors, secret agents”, and one can add prophets!

The “Lord” is the traditional translation of “Yehouah”, which otherwise is the proper name of God, “Adonai” being the name that actually means “Lord.” One wonders to what extent this is a later Greek convention. “Yehouah” is tantalising close in pronunciation to “Ahura”, the Persian word for Lord, when the “r” is not rolled, a common mispronunciation when foreigners try to copy the sound of unfamiliar words.

“Yehouah Elohim” must mean “Yehouah of the Gods”, which would offer an explanation, if “Yehouah” always meant “Lord” from the Persian, why Yehouah a son of El took his place as the chief god in the Jewish religion. The original Canaanite god was “Yehu”, “YW” in the Ugaritic tablets, and possibly “Yehu ha Elohim” has been heard by the colonists as “Ahura Elohim”, and the latter was heard by the Am ha Eretz as “Yehouah Elohim.” In any event, the Persian word for Lord was possibly misheard as the Canaanite name of a god.

“Yehouah of Hosts” is Haggai’s preferred name for God—Yehouah Sabaoth, God of Hosts, a title that prophets were fond of but which is not so popular elsewhere in the scriptures. It does not appear in the Pentateuch. Sabaoth occurs 285 times, most often in Isaiah (62), Jeremiah (77), Haggai (14), Zechariah (53) and Malachi (24). Sabaoth, hosts, meant the heavenly bodies (*Dt* 4:19)—but came to mean angels and armies—so it indicates the God of Heaven. The Babylonian god, Nabu (Persian, Tishri), was titled the “marshaller of the hosts of heaven and earth”, and Sin, the Moon God, was the “Prince of the Gods”, implying a position of authority among them.

As a nation of priests the colonists had to keep themselves aloof from the unclean natives. Even if the natives converted to the pseudo-Zoroastrian Yehouah worship, they would still not be priests, so the colonists always would be aloof from the people. Haggai sought to shame the colonists, who were plainly in a small minority interested only in themselves, to get to work on building the temple, but they were too few to do all the work themselves, so he had to get the assistance of the Am ha Eretz, who were somehow making their own offerings somewhere (*Hag* 2:14), presumably on the “high place.” The prospects of economic prosperity was hung out as a carrot.

The colonists must have had Zoroastrian ideas of ritual purity, having been taught by Zoroastrian priests such as Haggai. Haggai seems not to have taught the priests, or told the Am ha Eretz, that the natives were unclean, and could have no part in sacerdotal matters when the work was finished, until three months after they started work (*Hag* 1:15;2:10-14)! We know from *Ezra* that they were refused leave to help the project of the new temple, and here in Haggai it appears again in a different and clearer form.

The unclean people would have built the bulk of the temple, and perhaps any city walls that went along with it, while the clean Jews would have had to build the Holy Place. Having made their contribution the locals were discarded (perhaps unless they converted to the new Yehouah, which few at first were ready to do).

In *Haggai* 2:5 seems to be a reference to the Exodus, but few scholars will not admit that it is an obvious interpolation by a later editor. The law of Moses was brought to the colonists at this very time by Ezra as the bible explains, but every clergyman ignores.

### **A Rebellion against Persia?**

The final four verses (*Hag* 2:20-23) eulogize Zerubabel as the universal eschatological ruler. Yehouah will overthrow the “throne of kingdoms”, the chariot and its riders and the strength of the nations. It sounds like a call to rebellion, but Zerubabel might mean Zoroaster. Is there here Zoroastrian mythology about the eschaton misunderstood and written into history? Have we an edited version of what was originally the expression of the Saoshyant, a descendent of Zoroaster, appearing when God shook the earth at the End Time?

In the ninth month of the fourth year of Darius, when the temple was approaching completion, there was apparently a contest between the civil and religious heads of the community for the control of the temple. Zerubabel, the civil governor, claimed authority, but Zechariah decided in favour of the high priest. Thereafter, Zerubabel disappears from the account. In the last stages of the building of the temple, no Persian governor is mentioned, unless Nehemiah was serving that role, and Zerubabel was really Ezra.

The builders of the temple completed their work in March, the last month of the sixth year of Darius II, not the Great! It was the third day of Adar, the last of the Babylonian year, according to the Aramaic document in *Ezra* (*Ezra* 6:15), but 23 Adar, according to *1 Esdras*. The rebuilding under Darius was started from the foundation, before a stone was laid on a stone, and it took four and a half years to accomplish—more than enough time.

Leroy Waterman believes that Haggai, Zerubabel and Joshua plotted against Darius the Great during the period of revolutions that he met when he murdered Bardiya. The Empire of Cyrus and Cambyses was in turmoil, with rebellions breaking out everywhere, but Darius and his generals painstakingly put them all down until Darius resumed absolute control over his vast kingdom. That could not have been the situation if the Darius was Darius II, but the event might have been a garbled cautionary warning to the Jews in which an earlier rebellion against the Persians was highlighted.

The apparent announcement of Joshua or Zerubabel as the king of Judah by Haggai could look as though the Jews were themselves rebelling against Darius. Evidence is taken to be that the three principle plotters were never heard of again, as though Darius had had them killed for their presumption.

Outside the canon of the Hebrew bible are numerous books that do not recognize any cessation of the so-called “exile.” For them there was no return with Ezra or rebuilding of the legitimate temple.

Robert P Carroll

Enough Jews must have “returned” in only about 16 years in the biblical chronology to have made a rebellion against Darius the Great possible, and that seems most unlikely, unless the rebels were the native people of the hill country and not “returners.” If this had been the case, the failed rebellion would have appeared in the scriptures as a further punishment by God for the apostasy of the inhabitants that had not gone into exile. Haggai does not make this out, but that the “returners” had been backsliding, in failing to build the temple.

If Haggai really were advocating a secession of the country from the Persian empire led by Zerubabel and Joshua, then he was foolish to have written it down, thereby incriminating himself when the project failed, as it must have done. Why also would the words of a rebel be preserved by the later priesthood, who were presumably acceptable to the Persian kings, and indeed became models of loyalty?

Zerubabel is called by God “my servant” and he is also considered a signet, or more properly a seal, of God. A signet was not necessarily a finger ring, though it could be. It was often a ring worn around the neck, or a cylinder that could be used to impress wax or clay. Seals were used to prove ownership of any valuable item, but also to authenticate important items notably decrees of kings and covenants. It was proof that “God had chosen him.” In Persian and Assyrian reliefs, a god is often shown handing a ring to the king. It is a sign of a bond or covenant. In *Ezekiel* 28:12, a king is a signet (seal) of perfection.

Zerubabel must be the final Saoshyant—the perfect man, Zoroaster incarnated—who appears in Zoroastrianism at the End of Time when the world would be restored to its pristine form of the creation. The propaganda of Haggai was that the completion of the temple would be a substantial step toward the coming of the Saoshyant, Zerubabel (Zoroaster), and the victory of the Good Creation, which he described at the end of his message. A later editor in ignorance of Zoroastrian mythology and its relevance to the origins of Judaism thought Zerubabel was a historical participant in the drama, and, as such a senior figure chosen by God, must have been the governor, Joshua being the priest. He therefore added Zerubabel to Joshua at what he thought were appropriate points earlier in the story where he thought he must have been omitted. Only in these last four verses does Zerubabel appear not linked with Joshua.

Note that Zerubabel is given as the son of Salathiel, which means “The Branch of El”, a messianic title, supposing El to be identified at a later date with Yehouah. Jesus was called “The Branch.” Zerubabel was properly “The Branch of El”, not the son of a man of this name, a later rationalization. *1 Chronicles* 3:17,19 makes Pedaiah his father, and Pedaiah means “Yehouah’s Redeemer”, a messianic title that equals “the Branch.” Biblical commentators explain the two different fathers as being because Zerubabel was adopted!

If Zerubabel had been mistakenly associated with an earlier period, then he could have been thought to have participated in an uprising, and this used as an excuse for excluding from the history. Moreover, an earlier new temple built by earlier “returners” was then destroyed by the enraged Persians:

For a little while Your holy people possessed it. Our enemies have trampled Your sanctuary.

*Isaiah 63:18*

Your holy cities are a wilderness; Zion is a wilderness; Jerusalem is a desolation. The house of our holiness and our beauty where our fathers praised You has become a burning of fire, and all our pleasant things have become a ruin.

*Isa 64:10*

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 3. Ezra & The Law**  
**Deuteronomic Second Law? or First?**

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### **Moses and The Pentateuch**

Distinguished scholars have been obliged to recognize that *Deuteronomy* is neither as old as it pretends to be nor written by Moses, but since getting Christian scholars to accept any alternatives to their preferred supernatural beliefs is like getting them to extract their own teeth, they will attenuate all such truths as best they can. While conceding that Moses did not write the *Pentateuch*, Christians feel it necessary to say “but fragments are from his time or even earlier”. Perhaps so, but these early elements show no signs of being of Israelite or even Egyptian provenance. They are Mesopotamian!

If the early history of Israel was written by a man from Egypt, or even simply relates events that had their origins in Egypt, as Moses and the Israelites were supposed to have had, then it is hard to see why their main mythological traditions are from another civilization. It is even harder to understand in view of the constant theme in the Israelite tradition of lack of respect or interest in their own traditions shown by most of the Israelite and Jewish people throughout history. “Oral transmission”, is the permanent cry to explain difficulties of continuity. The slaves of the Egyptians told each other the stories of Abraham for hundreds of years in slavery, but as soon as they left Egypt with Moses they lost interest in their own traditions and began to worship Egyptian bulls in only a few years. Such excuses are only believed by believers, because they do not hold the water of reason. The story of Moses is fraudulent, and excuses are invariably needed by Jewish and Christian believers in these tall tales.

### **Exodus—History or Just-so-Story**

Often it is hard to understand what believers actually do believe. H H Rowley, a well known scholar of a few years ago, tells us it is unlikely that the Israelite tribes entered the land as a united group. They had spent 400 years in slavery in Egypt and emerged under the leadership of one man, Moses, who remained their leader for forty years of wandering. Yet they finished up separated into a diversity of different tribes. What made them split up into tribes in only a few decades despite their charismatic leader? Since there were supposedly around two million people, they might have needed leaders below the level of Moses, but it is a poor reflexion on Moses that these subordinates had allowed the tribes to become disunited. Not all of the tribes were even enslaved in Egypt, including the tribe of Judah, according to some scholars who see Judah joining the federation through the success of David!

Rowley assures us that the tribes must have had laws before Moses. Yet how do slaves have laws? Slaves are deprived of all the rights of citizenship. How can they have laws? Some of the slave owning countries of antiquity had laws concerning slaves, but they were not the slaves’ laws. In the myth, Moses was a senior Egyptian administrator, so knew something about law, but the average Israelite slave could not have. So, ignorant former slaves were given laws by an Egyptian administrator, accepted them in unity, yet still entered Canaan as different tribes and at different times—as nomads! A mass of ex-slaves wandering around aimlessly for a few



decades do not just become nomads!

To believe these Christian ploys is to disbelieve the myth of Moses, but it becomes somewhat more believable, historically, that Palestine was infiltrated by a variety of different people over a long time. Christians will see no discrepancy in the two versions, such is the wonder of faith. Christian commentators and scholars will propagate such incompatible views, though they know better, because their sheepish readers are desperate to accept anything to bolster their faith. The truth is that *no* Israelite tribes were enslaved in Egypt, and anything was possible in the story of Moses and the Exodus, because it was only a story—not a history!

## **Babylonian Links**

And what of the plain enough Babylonian links that are undoubtedly present in *Genesis*? Rowley dismissed them as unimportant because the Jewish scriptures are “permeated with a religious quality which is quite different”. He thinks they are quite different because he has to believe somehow that God revealed these things to Jews first, then to Christians, even though some of the stories are traceable to ancient Akkadian mythology. In God’s revelation of them they were transformed and so were different! A historian would want to know what is different and why it is, but a believer does not ask such questions. They know the answer—it is faith—and no amount of scientific evidence will persuade them otherwise.

For more enquiring Christians, there *is* now too much evidence against the historical truth of most of the scriptures, so they are now retreating to the blatant acceptance of it as mythology, though they admit this only when pressed by skeptics and not to their flocks—it is “religious literature” not “literal truth!”

Still, what are the ancient fragments, they hang on to to keep the bible ancient? The Song of Deborah is “probably” contemporary, the Balaam oracles in *Numbers* “may” be even older, though some scholars disagree and do not consider them ancient! The Song of Lamech and the blessings of Rebekah and Jacob “may well” be of great antiquity. The quizical marks simply highlight the degree of scholarship involved in biblical scholarship. Students who turn newly to this “scholarship” find “probablies”, “mays” and “mights” everywhere—far more than anything positive. These scholars want to use the scriptures as historical proof of their belief that they demonstrate God’s plan for human salvation, but they then find little historical in them. So, they use these weaselly qualifiers to fool unwary readers into thinking that scholarship upholds their irrational beliefs by verifying the truth of the biblical texts. Instead of the scriptures being a book of history, for Christians it is a book of “probablies”. The truth is that it is a book of “improbabilities”.

Christian teachers will blandly assure us that the laws in the Pentateuch have their parallels in Babylonia and Northern Mesopotamia, and the sheep are duly satisfied, but others do a double-take and remind them that these slaves were escaping from Egypt not Mesopotamia. How did slaves, or tribes as they became in no time at all, get to know the laws of Hamurabi. Well, of course, they remembered them from the time of Abraham who would have known them, and they remembered them for several hundred years even though they were illiterate brick-makers! Then again, perhaps God just handed them down on tablets of stone, but based on the models he had tried out in Babylonia where he had pretended to be a Pagan god, just to see if the laws he was working out, would work in practice. Apparently they were all right, so he handed down a version of them to His pal, and outstretched right hand, Moses. The historical truths of the bible have to be justified somehow!

The laws had a great deal in common with Babylonian laws because they came from Babylonia, but at a time much later than Moses is supposed to have lived—when Babylonian and Assyrian, then Persian, people conquered the hill country of Palestine. The laws of Moses are much later laws imposed on the Israelites from outside but projected into the past to allow the local people to believe they were their own! The way the laws are set forth is said to be peculiarly Israelite, but it is essentially because the laws are commands rather than examples. Someone must be doing the commanding. “God”, is the reply, but no god has yet been able to enforce his commands. The commands of gods are enforced by humans—here the suzerain to whom the Israelites were vassals—the Assyrians initially, accounting for the myths of Abraham and perhaps the earliest forms of covenant, but then the Persians.

## Deuteronomy

Ronald Clements, a Cambridge *Old Testament* scholar and Baptist minister, says *Deuteronomy* is “the textbook of a programme of religious education” which “was theological comment and interpretation as means for renewing and reforming faith” (*God’s Chosen People*, 1968). It notes the variety of religious practices current in the land when it was introduced, causing social unrest and moral decline. A central aim of it was to give the people a clearer understanding of God, and the meaning and purpose of religion. Vitally, the novel teaching of *Deuteronomy* was directed at the whole nation. *Deuteronomy* was meant to be heard by everyone! It was meant to be read out, and was meant to be spoken about continually from childhood onwards. G von Rad notes that “*Deuteronomy* is motivated by the desire to instruct...” calling it “preached law”. It calls itself, “*Torah*” (*Dt* 4:44; 17:19f), explained (*Dt* 4:45) as “testimonies, statutes and ordinances”. It was propaganda meant to indoctrinate. Clements tells us it was “directed at moving the minds and wills of men”, and its vehicle was the sermon. It is the very origin of the sermon!

*Deuteronomy* is presented as a long speech uttered by Moses with some additional material enclosing it. In the speech, Moses refers to the making of a “copy” of “this law” for the use of the king (*Dt* 17:18), an expression rendered in the Greek of the *Septuagint* as “deuteronomy”. A simpler translation is “second law”, a rendering that the Hebrew will also bear!

*Deuteronomy* is the fifth book of the *Pentateuch*, the Jewish *Torah*, supposedly written by Moses himself, yet this ends with Moses’s death on Mount Nebo, and Moses refers to himself continuously in the third person rather than the first, as he does elsewhere, showing that he is written as a character in a story by an anonymous author. Furthermore, the first verse of the book shows that the account was written in Canaan itself, and not on the east bank which is as far as Moses got to before he died, and the concluding verses add that the account was written a long time after Moses had died—long enough to make the comment that no one since had equalled him meaningful. So, the account was written by people already settled in Palestine not by Moses himself as Jews and Christians persist in believing contrary to the evidence, and at a much later date.

Curiously, the speeches of Moses are sometimes addressed to a singular audience and sometimes to a plural one. It suggests that two texts have been clumsily merged or that a change from the singular to the plural, since the singular version is thought to be the oldest, has been clumsily effected. It seems that the Persians initially issued a code of law to the person who had to administer them—presumably the Chief Priest—so the instructions were singular. The Chief Priest will have used this to read out the law to the people on ceremonial occasions, thus addressing the people plurally while sometimes reading from his singular text, and an

amanuensis captured it as it was read.

Martin Noth, in 1943, placed the author of *Deuteronomy* and the succeeding history books in the mid-500s BC. He thought it was a man left behind when the rest of his class were exiled by the Babylonians. Not all the population were exiled but only a small proportion—but they were the educated classes, the intellectuals and the artisans, and so those left behind were only poor peasants and farmers. It seems unlikely that anyone left behind would have been able to write such a book or had reason to—the country was occupied by a foreign army. Nor could he have had access to the records he needed.

The date of *Deuteronomy* has to be brought forward another hundred years or so to the fifth century BC. The Persian administrators wrote the book to back up the deportees being taken from Babylonia to Palestine, in the Persian province of Abarnahara. Accepting that Noth and Rupert Smend had good reason for accepting the internal evidence that the place of composition was Palestine, then it must have been written in the Persian period because it was the only time after the Babylonian conquest when authors would have had the education and resources to write it and its accompanying history. Writing about the same time as Noth, I Engnell put its composition in the Persian period.

To imagine that Moses in the thirteenth century BC was legislating for accurate weights and measures among ex-slaves and shepherds is so absurd as to be laughable. *Deuteronomy* 25:13-16, where this is done, is proof of the Persian origins of these laws, these being measures taken by Darius to stabilize his vast empire and to stimulate trade. Persian kings were keen to promote private enterprise rather than having all important transactions and merchanting done by the state.

Akkadian “shekalu” meant to “weigh”, and thence came to mean to “pay”. What was weighed out for payment became known as a “shekel”. Darius provided for fair payment to hired hands, and Persians introduced coinage, from the Lydians who were among the earliest of Cyrus’s conquests, but it did not prove as popular in the east—where people preferred to be payed in produce like grain—as it did in Greece and Anatolia, so the Persians also legislated for fair exchange by regulating and standardising weights and measures. With these and coinage, everyone could be confident they were being payed properly.

After grain, silver was the customary valuable weighed out for payment, but no one had the idea of minting the irregular shaped weights used until the Lydians did it. It left opportunities for crooks to cut or file off bits of the precious metal, leaving a short weight. A minted weight could not be ill-treated or filed without it looking obvious. The Persians and Greeks took up the idea from their neighbour, the Lydians, and Darius the Great introduced the Persian Daric. Every scholar must know that to place such legislation 800 years earlier is wrong, and its presence here points to the true date of composition in the fifth century BC.

Though standardised measures were not enforced until the Persians did, biblicists like to find standard measures in Israel to agree with the traditional Moses. Not a single measuring rod has been found, and only three volume measures have been.

Our data are very incomplete.

B S J Isserlin, *The Israelites*

The jars are unlikely to have been standard measures at all, but just jars with a measure marked on them, the “bath”, indicated by “b” or “bt”. One is a royal bath, as if it were different. More common are weights in the form of stones or less often metal. The standard unit is the shekel, and various sub units are also found, including the pym. The value of the weight is uniformly written in Egyptian hieratic. No one seems to have tried to check these weights to see to what extent they were standardised.

## Josiah and Deuteronomy

Scholars accept that the core of *Deuteronomy* is the list of laws in *Deuteronomy* 12-26. The bible has, within its *Deuteronomistic History* (2 Kg22:3f), a description of the discovery of an unknown scroll of the law in the Jerusalem temple that motivated Josiah, the reforming king, to reform the cult of Judah. The book was found by Hilkiah, the High Priest, in the reign of Josiah, when the temple was being renovated. Christians since the time of Jerome have understood that this book was *Deuteronomy*. The first scholar to consider *Deuteronomy*, De Wette, branded it a forgery, written shortly before it was “found” and not by Moses. Few people disagree.

Since the story about the discovery of the book (2 Kg 22-23) was written by the same school as the authors of *Deuteronomy*, it is doubtless part of their scheme of deception. Josiah is supposed to have initiated religious reforms on the basis of the book, though some scholars think that this too is false. The reforms mentioned in 2 Kings 23 as undertaken by Josiah as a result of finding the book are the reforms mentioned in *Deuteronomy*, and some of them occur nowhere else. Plainly the history was meant to accompany the book. The nature of the “reforms” disprove their claim to be reforms. They utterly suppressed all freedom of religion under pain of death:

- ☐ Canaanite altars had to be put away, so that the people would be obliged to turn to the new universal god (*Dt* 4:16-18,23;7:5,25;12:3).
- ☐ High places where the former gods were worshipped had to be destroyed (*Dt* 12:2).
- ☐ Abominations to the new god must cease (*Dt* 12:29-31;18:9).
- ☐ Sorcery must cease and instead only the new god’s prophets obeyed (*Dt* 18:10-22).
- ☐ Religious prostitution and dog priests were banned (*Dt* 23:17).
- ☐ Heavenly objects, nor any of the host of heaven may be worshipped (*Dt* 4:19;17:2-7).
- ☐ The god replacing the Canaanite pantheon is a god of heaven like Ahuramazda (*Dt* 10:14,17) who has given the Land to the people (*Dt* 4:38,40; 6:18f,23).

The specific reference to kingship, in *Deuteronomy* (*Dt* 17:18-20), tells us that the king had to be approved by God as an administrator of the law which he had to study diligently all his days, but otherwise was an ordinary man.

Josiah allegedly centralized the cult on the temple of Jerusalem, but as Clements observes, “*Deuteronomy* grew up on the basis of traditions which did not originate from Jerusalem, at least not from its priesthood.” The distinct traditions of the Jerusalem priesthood are clear in the *Holiness Code* of *Leviticus*, the restoration programme of *Ezekiah*, and the priestly documents in general. C F Burney, supported by A C Walsh and G von Rad, associated *Deuteronomy* with cult centers to the north of Jerusalem, at Shechem and Bethel, but Clements remained more non-committal:

Josiah's reforms witnessed the adoption and enforcement in Jerusalem of traditions which derived from outside...

These are not internal reforms of a corrupted religion, but the imposition of a completely new one, and historically that happens through conquest rather than internally. Josiah's reforms are dated to 621 BC, a mere 25 years before Judah was initially wasted by the Babylonians, and only 35 years before it was finally destroyed by them. Scriptural scholars, like R H Pfeiffer and G von Rad, consider that *Deuteronomy* was the written document that began the collection and compilation of the Jewish scriptural canon. Beginning with this as the core of the Jewish scriptures, the other books were added to form the complete corpus. This is quite a different story from the one presented in the bible itself. The words of *2 Kings* 23:2 rendered as *Book of the Covenant* may be better translated as the "covenant document". The ancient Hittite and Assyrian treaty documents were written as covenants between the suzerain and the vassal. They closely follow the form of the covenants mentioned in the Jewish scriptures. G E Mendenhall noticed this and there is now no argument about it, although some biblicists futilely still try to deny it. If it is denied, believers have to ask why God should have chosen to represent His own covenant with His Chosen people as a covenant on the lines of ancient vassalage treaties. If it is accepted that it is indeed a vassalage treaty, and the Jews were the vassals, then who could the suzerain have been? It could only have been Persia.

The central, older part of *Deuteronomy* betrays no knowledge of any other biblical covenants, except a brief identification with the Sinai covenant (*Ex* 19-34), though the author of *Deuteronomy* mysteriously calls Sinai Horeb. The covenant of *Deuteronomy* is made directly with the people addressed and not with their fathers (*Dt* 5:1-2). It is a *new* covenant, not a *renewed* one, but reference is repeatedly made in the introductory chapters and the concluding ones, though only a few times between, to the covenant made with the three patriarchs, described as "your fathers". The speaker, Moses, has the authority of God, and will have been God originally—Ahuramazda (Lord Mosha)! He refers to promises made to earlier colonists, represented by the patriarchs, men who were sent to the colony only a generation or two before the main settlement. The later false history made Abraham anachronistically travel from Ur of the Chaldees before it ever existed, a millennium before. Abraham is a symbolic "returner" from "exile", given a promise of land by the Persian shah. The ill discipline of these earlier colonists led to the sterner rule imposed by Ezra on a new band of settlers. *Deuteronomy* is pervaded with a sense of urgency.

## **Returners as Deported Colonists**

The Deuteronomists wrote the books immediately following *Deuteronomy* in our bibles up until *2 Kings*, so they included most of the history of Israel until the conquests. Among the aims of the Deuteronomic History is to give the impression that the laws in *Deuteronomy* had already been introduced in the seventh century, a few decades before Judah was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, these laws were imposed by Persian deportees being transported into Palestine to further Persian foreign policy. So, the time was at least 100 years after the time presumed in *2 Kings*, perhaps when Zerubabel and Joshua returned, or when a later phase of deportees arrived a few decades later. Israel is always described a "few" or a "small nation", yet millions are supposed to have left Egypt just a few decades before. The "few" were the deportees being transported into Babylonia.

No one either in the Land or in among the deportees could dispute the facts. The deportees were presented as "returners" who somehow "remembered" what their great grandparents knew, indeed who preserved an Israelite

tradition though they were transported elsewhere and undoubtedly given equally onerous duties by the Babylonians. The Babylonians would not have allowed them any records, and would have destroyed any that they tried to take with them as subversive. The Persians equally would not have allowed any records, even supposing there were any, to be taken back to Israel. And what could these records have been? In Mesopotamia, they were written in cuneiform on clay tablets. Inasmuch as any permanent records were taken into Israel by the deportees, they were on tables (tablets) of stone (*Dt* 4:13; *Ex* 32:15)!

The “returners” were given their “records” by the Persian administrators to suit Persian policy. Jewish “history” became whatever their conquerors wanted it to be, to suit their pacification policies. These were the introduction of a new universal religion and laws acceptable to the new god and his earthly agent, the Persian king. *Deuteronomy* 21:23 is purely Persian in forbidding a crucified man from being allowed to defile the sacred land. The “returning” deportees could claim that king Josiah had already introduced these laws before the Babylonian conquest, and the Deuteronomic Historians backed up this claim with the “authentic” records they brought back with them. The people would have had to have accepted what they said. They could not read!

The chief incentive for the colonists was the promise of land forever (*Dt* 1:8,21,25; 2:12,19,29; 3:20; 4:1,14,26,40; 5:16,31,33; 6:1,3,10,23; 7:1,13,19; 8:1; 9:23; 10:11; 11:8,9,11,21,29,31; 12:1,10; 15:4; 16:20; 17:14; 18:9; 19:8,14; 21:1,23; 23:20; 24:4; 25:15,19; 26:1,3,15; 27:2,3; 28:8,11,21,63; 30:5,16,18,20; 31:7,13,20,21,23; 32:47,49; 34:4). Any reader has to admit that this emphasis on the prize looks like overegging the pudding, but shows how important the incentive was! Nor is the assurance of land given to a people who are resuming their place in a land which is rightly theirs, who know the land and long to be back on it. It tells them how good the land is because they knew nothing about it (*Dt* 8:7-10). They are being given a land which rightly belongs to the Canaanites. The true situation is stated as clear as daylight in *Deuteronomy* 12:1-7, where the people being addressed were to dispossess the native inhabitants of their land. Their native religions were to be destroyed. *Deuteronomy* lays down that God is one, Yehouah is the one, the people are his holy people who must worship Him ultimately at one place according to one law. The people were being offered a new faith in a new country. *Deuteronomy* 8:19-20 has threats for those turning to the idolatry of the native Canaanites or reverting to their own. They are not receiving the land because they deserve it, but because the Canaanites did not (*Dt* 9:4-5)! Their good fortune in receiving the gift of the land is entirely due to the grace of God (*Dt* 8:17-18).

All of this posed a problem when the bible was being recast by the later editors convinced the return really had to be a “return” from “exile” into familiar territory they had never forgotten. The God-like figure of Moses also had to be explained. And so the myth of the Exodus from Egypt was invented around 300 BC, initially. It is cast back in history to the thirteenth century BC, but historians now know that no such conquest happened then. The true circumstances are more recent, the enforced deportation of people from Mesopotamia to Canaan (Abarnahara—Beyond the River), misnamed “The Return from Exile”, because the deportees were falsely told they had previously been deported out of this land. *Deuteronomy* 7:8 refers to God redeeming the people “from the House of Bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt” but with no mention of an Exodus. So Egypt had been cast as the villain, but the myth of the Exodus was still to be written.

In *Deuteronomy* 26:3, when the gifts of the first fruits of the land were brought as payment to God for the use of the land, the offerer has to say to the officiating priest:



I declare this day to Yehouah Elohim that I have come into the land which Yehouah swore to our fathers to give us.

It shows that the people making the offerings were not the natives of the temple state of Yehud—the priests and functionaries—the nation of priests. The temple state acted as the focal point for tax collection. It collected the taxes of all of the people of Abarnahara, not simply the local Jews. The giver then had to say a creed beginning:

A wandering Aramæan was my father—

to remind him of his ancestor's previous unsettled state, and their oppression by the Egyptians. This short creed, combined with others (compare, for example, the creed of *Deuteronomy* 6:21-25) and expanded by degrees, was the basis of the Exodus myth, composed later.

What was the purpose of the law? The answer given by *Deuteronomy* is "that it may go well with you" (*Dt* 4:40; 5:16,33; 6:3,18; 12:25,28). The implication is that disobedience of the law meant things would not go well! In what sense? Again, *Deuteronomy* is plain enough that obedience of the law meant "that you may live, and that good may be to you, and you may prolong your days in the land which you will possess" (*Dt* 5:33, etc). So, failure to obey the law might mean various misfortunes or punishments, a curtailment of life, or even mass deportation. Since the reward for righteousness is the land, the punishment for disobedience, dissent and rebellion was to lose it (*Dt* 4:25-26; 8:19-20; 28:21,24,33,36,42,51,64). A breach of the covenant—the suzerain-vassalage treaty—is that the vassals are expelled from the land. They are deported to a less favourable situation, to start again.

*Deuteronomy* is followed by the historical books of *Joshua*, *Judges*, *Samuel* and *Kings*, which justify the principles of *Deuteronomy* by highlighting the effects of apostasy throughout the history of the Israelites. *Deuteronomy* 13 explains what must be done when people tempt the Hebrews into apostasy. False prophecy—the category into which Jesus falls—the punishment of stoning so that the avengers will not be polluted by contact with the sinner, and the "ban" or total destruction of apostate cities are mentioned. The "ban" is an older law—or rather a vow for vengeance or justice—being used against the native Canaanites here.

More warnings of destruction for disobedience appear in *Deuteronomy* 7:10-11, and the idols and shrines of the native Canaanites were also ordered to be utterly destroyed. The purpose was plainly not humanitarian as modern commentators try to pretend, but to impose the foreign religion and laws of the Persians in pursuit of their foreign policy. It is impossible for anyone rational to read *Deuteronomy* without seeing coercion and propaganda in every word.

In *Deuteronomy* 10:12-22, the god being imposed to replace the pantheon of the Canaanites was a god of heaven, like Ahuramazda. In *Deuteronomy* 10:17, appear the expressions "god of gods", and "Lord of lords", reminiscent of the Persian title for their emperor—king of kings. The people were obliged to love and obey the new god when he issued his commandments and laws. *Deuteronomy* 4:19 is the Jewish Shema, the confession of faith in one god. It was necessary to assert it because the deportees are formerly believed in more than one, and the Canaanites whom they were being sent to rule were also polytheistic. *Deuteronomy* frequently speaks of "your god". Who is saying "your" as if the speaker were not included? Moses? Moses says "our God". It is

always assumed to be an impersonal way of saying “I”, when God is speaking but it strongly suggests that someone is imposing a god. Someone is ordering someone else to obey “their” god. Fortunately for the Jewish and Christian leeches who live off widows’ mites, the scriptural story is extremely mixed up. The various stages of “returning”, each with an improved approach to their imposed task, gave us several layers of false tradition possibly added to a previous layer from Assyrian times. Later, changes were made under Greek influence and then by the Maccabees.

The Royalty law of *Deuteronomy* (Dt 17:14-17) has been altered or inserted by a later redactor because the shah would not have allowed Yehud an independent king, and nor would the later rulers, the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. The bible was thoroughly edited when the Hasmoneans won the civil war, allowing Judah to have a native king. It was specifically intended to count out the Greek kings of the previous 150 years in favour of a Jewish king, preceding the idea of a Davidic covenant. The author of *Deuteronomy* seems to know nothing about the covenant with David, or ignores it. The so-called divine election, whereby God chose the Jews before all other nations on earth to be His holy people, is entirely dependent on the Horeb covenant and the law which *Deuteronomy* constituted. The original work cannot have made indirect references to Solomon, and his excesses, and, if that is what they are, the words must have been added when the myth of the united monarchy was invented by the Hasmoneans to give their own rule a historical legitimacy.

The ascription of the same words to different prophets is one of the clues that the claim in 2 *Maccabees* that Nehemiah’s library—the official scriptures—were destroyed in the Maccabæan War and had to be put together from the remnants with a good deal of imagination is true. This was effectively a major redaction in the middle of the second century BC and accounts for whole chunks of a book allegedly written over a period of two millennia being so uniform. Most of it was written only a century before the birth of Christ!

Scholars recognize a uniformity of style and phraseology across several books from which they deduce the hand of one editor or a school with a house view and style. The original scriptures were damaged in the Maccabæan wars and the Maccabæan scribes re-wrote them, to reflect, glorify and justify the actions of the Hasmonæans. They will have used the older stories of the Deuteronomists but re-written them into a continuous narrative. Doublets and triplets show that the older sources were not uniform and the Deuteronomistic school used all the fragments they had rather than omit any. The sources of the monarchic history in 1 and 2 *Kings* must have been the Assyrian and Babylonian archives. The Deuteronomists actually name some of their sources (*The Book of the Acts of Solomon*, 1 *Kings* 11:41, *The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel*, 1 *Kings* 14:19, and *The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah*, 1 *Kings* 14:29). The *Annals of the Kings* might have been the original books written from the Assyrian archives by the Persian administrators, lost in the war. David and Solomon, conceivably based on some earlier myths, were converted into an allegorical history of the Maccabees.

## Prophets

*Deuteronomy*, though fairly uniform, has not been written by a single author. *Deuteronomy* is the only scriptural law code to mention the prophets. No prophet could be allowed to prophesy against Yehouah, and those who did were false prophets and had to die (Dt 13:1-5). Prophets were therefore contemporaries of those who wrote out this law.

Christians will accept that *Deuteronomy* reflects the work of the prophets who warned about apostasy in the eighth and seventh centuries—according to the scriptures—and was supposedly written in the sixth century. Linguistic and conceptual details are common with the so-called eighth century prophets, and so *Deuteronomy* is dated from them, but the only evidence of these prophets in the eighth century is the bible! Once the scriptures are ignored, the cause and effect relationship between the prophets and *Deuteronomy* has no basis. There is a little circularity here, but no Christian commentator cares to point it out. If *Deuteronomy* and the books in the scriptures attributed to some prophets have certain stylistic points in common, then there is justification for saying they were written in the same period or by the same school, but if any of this could be pseudepigraphy, then the date cannot be deduced internally, as these “scholars” like to do. Perhaps *Deuteronomy* preceded the writings of prophets, or perhaps they were written at the same time, or almost so.

This law recognizes that “prophets” were propagandists arguing for one or another party active in the politics of the country. Prophets obviously had been able to take a position opposed to the imposed God and His supposed law, but the law put an end to such liberalism. Those opposed to the new religion and regime were not to be tolerated and would be punished by death! Elsewhere (*Dt* 18:20-22), prophets could be false even when they were in favour of God and His law, and still suffered the fate of death. The criterion was whether the prophecy was fulfilled or not. The Persians were legislating against prophets, seemingly supporting the regime and religion, but promising impossible things to the people and thus creating dissent. This could have been as intolerable as outright opposition, and so was neatly nipped in the bud with this law. Whatever the Persian king was willing to allow happened, and all other promises were false, with deadly consequences for the prophet.

As propagandists, the prophets, could not accept any authority except their own, and so claimed they were speaking directly from God. No priests or princes could gainsay them. *Deuteronomy* claims the same authority, and many “scholars” have thought it was the work of prophets or expressed the view of a prophetic school. In fact, both the prophets and *Deuteronomy* expressed the views of the Persian shahs, who wanted to control their subjects by getting them to accept the law as being directly from God. The prophets spread a similar message of what God wanted in a peripatetic revivalist way. The authors of *Deuteronomy* did not pretend to be prophets as such, but were nevertheless writing the law with God’s authority. They could only have been the servants of the shah. The shah was the only man able to claim the authority of God, and that is plain in the Jewish scriptures where Cyrus is the messiah, and the prophets commonly have names relating to salvation. Covenants were agreed between rulers under the authority of their gods. That people in the 21st century still think old propaganda is the work of God is an indictment of religious liars, and an exposure of many people’s lack of discernment.

At *Deuteronomy* 18:15, Moses becomes a prophet, though previously his had been the voice of God speaking. Moses was downgraded from being God to being God’s prophet, and, in the Persian fashion of Zoroaster, a prophet like him would return. So, *Deuteronomy* and the prophets were giving the same message, but the books of the words of the prophets that appeared later in the scriptural canon were written as pseudepigraphs, making their message seem much older than its true age, and coming from a different, though comparable situation, where the Persians became their predecessors, the Assyrians. *Deuteronomy* came with the authority of the Persian minister of religion—apparently Ezra—and so was an official document of the ministry, a law imposed on the colonists, and for them to impose on the native people. The colonists were to be a nation of priests, so *Deuteronomy* appears as a Levitical book. It is depicted as the law given by Moses (Ahuramazda/Torahmazda) on the plains of Moab to the colonists about to enter the land.

The books of the prophets are pseudepigraphs, a type of forgery. If the purpose of the writings was to set up a false history, then all of it was written much later than it purports to have been, having been compiled and written after 538 BC in the Persian period, centuries after the putative prophets. Once the scriptures are seen as Persian propaganda, nothing prevents the core of them having been produced in the fifth century BC to enforce Persian rule over an important buffer state. Most of the Jewish scriptures are forged.

## **Eretz—Land and Earth**

*Deuteronomy* 1:7 describes the land the colonists were being given. It was the Persian and former Assyrian province of Abarnahara which yielded the word “Hebrews” for the people who lived there. In *Deuteronomy* 32:49, “Abarim” means “Hebrews”. Commentators, accepting the biblical sequence as true history, tell us that the Israelites were being given the land which later became the empire of David and Solomon. In fact, this mythical empire appeared in the human imagination later on and its fictitious dimensions based on this passage. The Euphrates is the north eastern boundary, whence the name of the land for the Assyrians and the Persians as “Beyond the River”, and the name of the people therein as the “Beyonders!”

The court history of David of *2 Samuel* and *1 Kings* is always presented as having been written by someone close to the events, as if the events ever happened. Many modern historians cannot accept that such a notable empire, though short-lived, could pass by without leaving any external impression. The “events” that the writer of the court history of David were so close to seem never to have happened, certainly in the way and on the scale they were depicted as happening. A Christian scholar can write a statement like “we know that court records were kept during the monarchy”, giving the impression that there is some additional evidence, when the statement is a deduction from the biblical mythology of David itself. It is more circular reasoning. We know nothing about David and his monarchy except what the Jewish scriptures tell us. Christians typically invite us to believe the scriptures because of the scriptures! Christian scholars are clever men who would be scientists or philosophers if they had chosen a useful career, so they tell us these things knowing it is wrong or falsely reasoned. They aim to deceive.

The theses of the Deuteronomistic historian are that kings should be faithful to god’s commandments and they never are, and kings should see to it that the pure cult is maintained centralized in Jerusalem, and they never do. The Persians could never have contemplated the idea of a king in its satrapies, and plainly this history began its life intended to deter the people from any ideas they might have that local kings would be any good. Margaret Gelinas sums it up as:

All the kings of Israel except Shallum, for whom there is no evaluation given, and Hoshea, the last king of Israel are condemned by the Deuteronomist with a standard formula: “He walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin which he made Israel to sin”.

Later writers have diluted the message slightly but obviously felt unable to completely change what had become to be well known as a sentiment and a history, so the best they could do was to make some kings seem better, particularly the great kings invented as having started both states. Even though these were shown as noble kings, doubtless by the Maccabees, they had to be shown as being flawed, since otherwise the whole of the familiar history of God’s struggles against good and bad kings would have been retrograde. The Judaeen kings

were not so fully condemned, although many were shown as wicked. A few were shown to have transcended the fate of kings, but this might have been ameliorative writing in Judah, none being possible in Samaria.

## Centralized Sanctuary

The Ark of the Covenant was built to hold the tablets of the law, this very law itself, and, if this was a mobile ark to transfer the holy words from sanctuary to sanctuary in the decades before worship was centralized at Jerusalem, it implies the draft borne about was a draft which did not specify the central place, whence the repeated circumlocution, “the place which Yehouah Elohim will chose” (*Dt* 12:5,11,14,18,21,26; 14:25; 15:20; 16:7,11,15,16; 17:8; 18:6; 26:2), showing that no place had been selected, and thus that the foundation of the temple in Jerusalem by David and Solomon is mythical. The Ark was a mobile container for the words of the covenant of Horeb. *Deuteronomy* 31:24-26 says the law should be placed “beside” the Ark. “Inside” is the preposition intended. R Clements recognizes that *Deuteronomy* is stark confirmation there was no unity of religion before it. Yet, even supposing that Hilkiah found *Deuteronomy* in the temple, Moses was supposed to have done his legislating 800 years before! It is yet more evidence the early biblical history is myth. *Deuteronomy* does not suggest that God’s chosen place would be the sanctuary “for ever”. It could not have been so because the threat of punishment for disobedience of the law was the loss of the land, and with it the loss of the sanctuary. God could choose some other people, a circumstance that Christians claim happened, yet they still treat Jerusalem as particularly holy!

The Deuteronomic historian tells us that Hezekiah centralized religion in Jerusalem, so how did Solomon? The author of *Deuteronomy* does not know where the new religion would be centralized. The truth is that the Persians, after initial failures with several shrines, centralized worship of Yehouah in Jerusalem. Writing about the time of Nehemiah and before Ezra, in about 450 BC, Herodotus has nothing to say about a great temple to Yehouah in Palestine! It seems that the late fifth century was when the temple of Yehud in Jerusalem was actually set up by the Persian administrators led by Nehemiah. The scriptures are notoriously indistinct except when they are telling stories, when they become remarkably precise, but they suggest that the deportees at first did not try to set up a central sanctuary, but set up several local ones, including one at Gerizim. Later, it was imposed, perhaps in the time of Xerxes, but little progress was made until Nehemiah and Ezra, later in the fifth century. The decision was retro-written into the scriptures, and was assumed by the immense revision of Ezra and his Priestly School. Thus the decision was given the implied authority of the mythical Moses. H H Rowley can admit that the Deuteronomic Historians wrote with a “religious and didactic purpose”, but they imagine it to be a purpose sent down to His prophets by God. It was the purpose of the Persian conquerors.

*Deuteronomy* chapter 26 describing the rites and rituals associated with the first fruits ceremonies again shows these laws pertained to a time before the sole sanctuary at Jerusalem had been set up. This does not show that the work was composed before Solomon, but that it was a composition of an earlier group of deportees from Babylonia, before the decision was taken to have a central temple rather than regional ones.

In *Deuteronomy* 11:29, the “blessing” is placed on mount Gerizim, where the Samaritans had their temple, suggesting that this was the originally chosen centre for the worship of the new Persian god. It was a Persian habit to put their temples on hills. The eventual choice of Jerusalem is on the top of a hill. The word used for “habitation” in *Deuteronomy* 12:5 is “shakhan”, a word used nowhere else in the *Old Testament* and one that has a remarkably Persian look.



## God's Purpose

In *Deuteronomy* 4:44-49, the introduction of *Deuteronomy* 1:1-5 is repeated with variations showing that the work is not uniform. The priests, the Persian administrators accompanying the deportees into Abarnahara, constantly remind the people who they are and their covenant obligations to the God of Heaven. It shows that *Deuteronomy* was written as an example of the procedure of reading the suzerain-vassal covenant that was placed in appropriate shrines to be read out periodically to the subject people to remind them of their obligations to their ruler. They are constantly reminded that they have crossed over into this land from the east. The speaker is given the name, Moses, but was really a Persian administrator or appointed priest speaking for the Persian shah and so for the Persian god, Ahuramazda. The audience are the Israel of Horeb, even though they were not supposed to have been allowed to see the promised land. Though Moses is depicted often as speaking as if the Israelites and therefore he himself were already in the Promised Land, his generation were later forbidden to enter it. The implication is that the earlier generation failed, and *Ezra* suggests that some of the earlier deportees did fail to fulfil their obligations and had to be replaced by more committed people.

*Deuteronomy* calls upon the people to love Yehouah (*Dt* 6:4; 7:9), and remember what he had done for them. In some of the vassalage treaties, the vassal was obliged to "love" the suzerain! W Schottroff noted that 12 of 16 occurrences of the verb "to remember" in *Deuteronomy* referred to past events like the deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The fact of slavery in Egypt is repeated several times (eg *Dt* 15:15; 16:12; 24:18,22), and the ancient harvest feast of Unleavened Bread was given a new interpretation as a celebration of a deliverance from Egyptian rule (*Dt* 16:2-3). The obvious purpose of this was to maintain the antipathy of the Jews for the Egyptians, and the people to benefit from this were the Persians. It is another feature of the vassalage treaties. The sense of urgency, in *Deuteronomy*, suggests a sense of crisis and impending destruction. This places it in the context of a recent rebellion against the Persians, and the threat of a once-and-for-all punitive expedition against the rebels in which Yehud would suffer. It happens that serious rebellions against Persian overlordship occurred in the mid-fifth century BC, in which Egypt might have been supported by the Canaanites who were traditionally in the Egyptian sphere of influence—their colonials or slaves, if you wish. Thus, the danger to the Jews of maintaining any such alliance against the Persians was highly topical when *Deuteronomy* was being read out to the assemblies in the sanctuaries of Yehud.

The choice given to the deportees is to love God and be obedient, when God will reward them, or do not and be punished. The purpose of the histories that went with the commandments was to show how God punished or rewarded His people in real life. So the people had to love God (*Dt* 6:5), but fear Him (6:13) lest He anger and destroy them (6:15). The agent of God's anger would have been quite clear to those being moved into Palestine as colonists for the Persians—the Persian king! In *Deuteronomy* 6:20, the Persian priests tell the deportees that they have to indoctrinate their own children with the anti-Egyptian propaganda that was the real reason why the Persians wanted a tame puppet state on Egypt's borders.

God is shown as personally declaring the *Ten Commandments* from the midst of fire, plainly a Persian allusion, showing its origins. The Persian kings could have no truck with rebellion as Darius proved. The empire was too large and loosely administered at first, and rebels took advantage of it, but Darius ruthlessly suppressed a whole series of rebellions and imposed stronger Persian rule.



## Keeping a Pure Religion

There was only one God (*Dt* 6:4-5, where both “our” and “your” are used of God, suggesting at least two authors, one of whom did not identify strongly with the Jews). The gods of other nations were not allowed to influence the god of the Jews, even if the foreign nations had to be exterminated to prevent it (*Dt* 7:1ff; 12:29ff). This is the attitude of the Persians to the Devas, the wicked gods, opposed to the Ahuras and Yazatas, the good gods. The Devas and their worshippers were to be exterminated. The Persians, of course, were a mighty enough nation to do it, but Yehud was not. Clements tries to justify this as conditioned by earlier times, but even then Judah, and even Israel, were in no position to eliminate their neighbours. It is not merely a clear out of the remnants of Canaanite religion, as the orthodox explanation has it. It is more strongly worded than that, and assures the reader that the Persians would exterminate those opposed to the universal God. God is the God of heaven and earth, and God of the heaven of heavens (*Dt* 10:14), as well as the God of gods and the Lord of lords, a god “who is not partial and takes no bribes”. All of this is Persian, the titles reflecting the Persian title, Shahanshah, king of kings, the qualities highlighted being the archetypal qualities of Mithras, the god of covenants and therefore uncorruptible, the Yazata who served as the visible face of the hidden God, Ahuramazda. That other gods exist was not denied, and they are legitimately worshipped by their own people (*Dt* 4:19), but they are not gods of this people. In fact, there was the idea of a heavenly court attended by the god of each nation, each a son of the High God, so that there were as many sons of God in heaven as there were separate nations on earth. Yehouah was the son of God who represented the Jews, but later became the High God Himself, in the eyes of His worshippers, and so has remained since for Christians.

In *Deuteronomy* 7:3, marriages with the women of the seven peoples of Abarnahara were forbidden, matching the practices of the Zoroastrians who were not allowed to marry outside their own religion, and *Deuteronomy* 7:5 makes it absolutely clear that the aim of the ban was religious not ethnic. The law of mixing in *Deuteronomy* 22:5 is another reminder that Jews must marry only within their own religion.

*Deuteronomy* 22:13-30 are laws concerned with maintaining a pure bloodline, a concern of the Persians, who were not a vastly numerous people when they first built the empire, and wanted to avoid dilution as well as keeping their religious line pure. Mary Boyce confirms that for Persians their ethnic and religious identities were the same, and so they were known to foreigners. Exactly the same has happened to “Jews”, great confusion existing about whether it is a religious or ethnic term. It is, of course, religious, Jews always having been thoroughly mixed racially.

The relationship of this with the cultic disqualifications in *Deuteronomy* chapter 23 is plain. Foreigners were not to be admitted, nor bastards, nor eunuchs, who presumably were not well regarded because they could not procreate, and perhaps because the Persians wanted to avoid anything like the Galloi of Rhea and Cybele ever arising. *Deuteronomy* 23:17, adds to this by refusing to allow cultic sex, including the “dog” priests who dressed as females for the purpose of religious sodomy. The provision for the children of the third generation will have been added by Herod and his Egyptian priests, known as Boethusians.

## Second Law

Chapters 12 to 26 of *Deuteronomy* are a list of apodictic laws that are largely original but with some changes. “Apodictic” means they are commands—instructions that cannot be gainsaid. There is no need to believe that

all the laws imposed reflected Zoroastrian practice. The Persian administrators were not so crude. They seem to have included old laws that seemed to the priests innocuous, or capable of being given a new moral justification. The practice of leaving a corner of a field unreaped or of leaving a sheaf behind (*Dt* 24:19) was an old animistic superstition based on the belief in a corn god or spirit who should not be left destitute lest he be angered. The Persians allowed it to continue with the justification that the corn was to be left for the poor to glean.

*Deuteronomy* 12:31 refers to people in Abarnahara burning their sons and daughters in the fire, to their gods, a known practice of the Phœnicians, the Greek name for the Canaanites, in the Tophet, a most venerated repository of the burnt bones of sacrificed children. Plainly, it was the Persians who put a stop to human sacrifice in Abarnahara. This has a bearing on the interpretation of the myth of Abraham and Isaac, which seems to have been created at that time to denote that human sacrifice was to end in favour of sacrificing sheep and doves. If the myth were true, there should have been no human sacrifice among the Jews and Israelites from a very early time, but history declares otherwise. The myth was invented to give the ban on child sacrifice an ancient provenance.

*Deuteronomy* 14:3-21 give the laws on the prohibitions on foods, directly introduced from Zoroastrianism but with some variations to suit local idolatrous practices and some later changes. *Deuteronomy* 14:22-29 provide for collections of first fruit for a sanctuary feast. This suggests that *Deuteronomy* precedes *Leviticus* and other priestly writings where the collections are for the priests not for communal use. It is the way all religions go! In *Deuteronomy* 15, the release from debts every seven years has a Babylonian or Persian ring (compare the seven days of creation, and the sabbath rest on the seventh day). Release of slaves and firstlings follow, the latter requiring unblemished firstlings to be dedicated to God, but consumed by the family not the priests, again sounding to be pre-*Leviticus*. Blemished firstlings can be eaten but not dedicated to God.

## Feasts

*Deuteronomy* 16:1-8 is the prescription for the Passover, previously a vegetative feast related to the spring equinox when the sun “passes over” the celestial equator. The Persians re-cast it as a memorial of the Israelites’ hypothetical captivity in Egypt, with the aim of annually reminding the Jews of who was their traditional enemy. *Deuteronomy* 16:7 says the Passover sacrifice had to be boiled, a Persian sacrificial custom. Persians revered the sacred flame and would not risk its pollution by touching an improper sacrifice directly as it would in burning and roasting. Boiling used the element of water to keep the element of fire from directly contacting the meat.

An idea appears in the Jewish scriptures that sacrifices at the altar were meant to be God’s food (*Ezek* 44:7,16; *Mal* 1:7,12; *Num* 28:2; *Lev* 21:6,8; 22:25). Scholars, mostly accepting the bible’s own chronology, take these references as ancient, and so reflecting the primitive stage of the religion (thus admitting the idea of Yehouah evolving!). Father De Vaux thought it was not so, but it was a late intrusion into Judaism. Both are correct, because Judaism is a late invention of the Persian imperial ministries. The intrusion was later by about a century, but the religion was still not so advanced. It came from the belief of the Egyptian priests who wrote much of the Exodus saga around 300 BC. The concept of a God in such anthropomorphic terms was quite alien to the Persian idea, which was essentially that held by believers still—that of a transcendent God who did not need to be fed by human beings. The real beneficiaries were the Levites, the caste of priests.

*Deuteronomy* has nothing at all to say about any priesthood of the line of Aaron or Zadok, all of the many mentions being to the Levitical priests (*Dt* 12:12,18,19; 14:27,29; 16:11,14; 17:9,18; 18:1,6,7; 24:8; 26:11,12,13; 27:9,14; 31:9,25). In the conventional chronology of the bible, Zadok appeared later, so could not have been allowed to appear in *Deuteronomy*, but Aaron, who was a Levite, was the founder of the hereditary role of High Priest, yet is not featured in this respect. In *Deuteronomy* 18:1, the Levitical priests are called “all the tribe of Levi”. Not until Aaron was dead, does *Deuteronomy* relate the appointment of the tribe of Levi to the privileged role of priests (*Dt* 10:8-9). Herodotus calls the Magi a “tribe” of the Persians, where he is using “tribe” to mean a class or a caste. It seems that the Levites were the Jewish title of the Persian “tribe” called the Magi, and the inventors of the myth of the Exodus, following Herodotus as they did, made the Levites into an actual tribe of the Jews. The Levites were the priestly caste of Yehud. They seem to have existed as priests of regional sanctuaries before the centralization of worship. *Deuteronomy* recognized that centralization would leave the village Levites destitute, yet they had a duty to teach the law (*Dt* 17:18;31:9, 24)) and so had to be supported. So it classed them with widows and orphans as meriting charity, and recognized (*Dt* 18:6-7) that Levites from towns away from the central sanctuary should be allowed to officiate in the sanctuary on set occasions. After the Persian period, in Hellenistic and Hasmonaean times, the Levites were relegated to lesser roles, and the rights of a new class of priests, the Zadokites was established by writing their founder into the mythical history. Other feasts are also prescribed. In *Deuteronomy* 16:9-12 a Canaanite harvest festival is converted into the feast of weeks, a celebration of the giving of the law at Horeb. In *Deuteronomy* 16:13-15, is the prescription for the feast of booths or tabernacles, originally the Canaanite wine harvest festival, re-cast as a memorial of the time spent in the desert with God in tents. *Deuteronomy* 16:16 is a deliberate mistranslation. It is not “appear before the Lord” but “see the face of the Lord”, implying a thrice yearly revelation of an otherwise hidden image of Yehouah, probably the double Ahuramazda-like image in the original mobile Ark, used before the sanctuary was settled at Jerusalem, and later placed in the Jerusalem temple.

## Officials

*Deuteronomy* 16:18 to 18:22 lists the officers to be appointed in the new colony. Here there have been subsequent changes to suit the changing situation of the Jews. No one considers the unlikelihood of slaves or wandering shepherds having much idea of the institutions and offices necessary for running a sophisticated state. Like much of the bible testaments, old and new, it is just blindly accepted without question by the faithful. Should anyone have the temerity to ask they will be told that “God knows” and told Moses! The reasonable answer is that these officers and offices were prescribed by the conqueror, the Persians, and their priestly administrators.

Ranks of judges, priests and prophets are mentioned, with some of their duties. The reference to a king was probably added at the time of the Maccabees. Nowhere in the *Pentateuch*, except here, are kings mentioned and nor would they be expected in a law being set up for a colony! Indeed the distribution of power among officers of equal status but representing different functions is the way power in a colony is diffused so that the emperor would not be challenged. Besides the king, we see here power being distributed. The implications of *Deuteronomy* 17:14-20 are of a king like Solomon with many wives and chariots, so the passage was inserted after the myth of Solomon was invented by the Maccabees. The mention of a “foreigner who is not your brother” will refer to the Greek kings who succeeded Alexander, like Antiochus IV Epiphanes who was hated by many Jews.

In *Deuteronomy* chapter 20, further Maccabaeen additions are found, it being impossible to imagine the Persians allowing the colonists of Yehud to raise armies against other Persian colonies. Doubtless what was here was more about the “ban” on idolatrous cities. Destruction of Canaanite cities that refused to convert from their old religion evidently was required, whence the need for cities of refuge, but armies and kings would not have been allowed. That something is odd about these passages is the provision for taking a wife from among captured women, and the law about later releasing her. Marrying foreign wives had already been forbidden and it does not match Zoroastrian practice. The additions are therefore post-Persian, most likely from the time of the Maccabees.

The symbols of worship mentioned in *Deuteronomy* 16:21-22 imply several sanctuaries, again suggesting this is a set of laws preceding the Jerusalem sanctuary. The priests, identified with the Levites and the tribe of Levi, were not to have any territory of their own.

The institution of prophet was the chief way the Persian would combat the Canaanite religions which seem to have been quite shamanistic, the shaman perhaps being considered a prophet. Thus prophets were needed to advocate the worship of the universal god in opposition to the native prophets of the Baals. Thus prophets were the first propagandists, reminding the people of their duty to obey the new god and the law being introduced by the Persians.

## Cities of Refuge

The beginning of *Deuteronomy* chapter 19 is strange. It provides for cities of refuge, an utterly mysterious concept until it is realized that the colonists, the people being transported in, were extremely unpopular. This is clear from *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, but the degree of unpopularity is made clear here by the need for cities of refuge. They were places where people could flee to when pursued by those wishing to avenge a murder.

The deportees were given the authority of a ruling class but they were necessarily weak at first when they were in small numbers and their novelties were seen as particularly intrusive. They had to destroy Canaanite shrines, and that could only create hatred. They would have had to protect and defend themselves and would have needed to retreat from time to time into secure refuges when Canaanite mobs got out of hand. A clumsy attempt has been made to justify the cities as being places where people could flee after “accidentally” killing someone else! Of course, there was no refuge for a murderous act upon a deportee, a neighbour. The requirement of two or three witnesses to bring a charge, mentioned in the trial of Jesus, appears in a context where multiple sanctuaries are assumed.

At the end of *Deuteronomy* chapter 21 is the law not to allow an executed man to hang after sunset. The Persian method of execution was crucifixion—hanging—so the reference here is to not letting a crucified man hang after sunset.

## Periodic Readings

“This day”, in *Deuteronomy* 26:16, means the day when the law was read out to the public, as the covenant treaties require—at each of the main festivals.

Much of the style of *Deuteronomy* is that of material read out, or orated, and it might be that the Deuteronomist took this from the purpose of the original which was to be read out as a covenant treaty with the Persian kings. The reader would have used all his oratorical powers to get acceptance for these policies and laws by his audience. We read frequent appeals, perhaps colloquial expressions and repetitive emphasis directed at exhorting the people to pursue the required course of action.

August Klosterman in 1907 realized that *Deuteronomy* was originally meant to be read out. Thus the addition of the plural was the adaptation of a set of instructions to the Jewish leader to a recital of the laws of the land to the congregations at the Jewish shrines. Characteristic phrases allow Deuteronomistic material to be distinguished from other writing. They are even found in Jeremy. These Deuteronomic editors assume a single sanctuary in Jerusalem while the earlier work implies several local shrines, though sometimes with an anticipation of their eventually being just one.

## Summary

Douglas Knight says that, without the Deuteronomic History, the history of Israel “would be as thin as the histories of many of the surrounding countries during this period”. The Deuteronomic history is the source of our knowledge of Jewish history. Without it we know little about it, with it we know too much—it is novelistic in its detail of distant events like the kingdoms of Solomon and David. It should give believers pause for reflexion. Is it mythical? Not all of it is, because some of the characters appear in external records and monuments, but many of the central characters, Moses, David, Solomon, are! It is myth, but some of the myth is built on a partially historical core provided by Mesopotamian historical records.

Knight also says it is a product of the end of monarchy, “at the very earliest”. Biblicists will try to put it in the period of the Exile, but the only reasonable period after the monarchy when it could have been written is the Persian period. Later amendments occurred under the Greeks and the Maccabees. Only the Persians could have access to the Assyrian and Babylonian records needed for much of Kings to have been written.

If scholars are right that the central part of *Deuteronomy* is associated with Israel, then it shows it is early. The earliest colonists seem to have been ready to set up the god, El, as the local equivalent of the God of Heaven. Knight also recognizes that the work was “self-seeking and tendentious”. The authors “sought to write a history that would cause their contemporaries to understand better their current situation”. What biblicists will not accept is that these people had been deported into Israel against their will, but were being given a privileged position as rulers of their adopted country as long as they imposed laws acceptable to the Persians and devotion to a universal Persian-like god. They were told they were being “returned” not “deported” from their previous homeland. And so the myth of the Babylonian Exile was created.

To oblige them to be obedient, and eventually the natives they would rule, they were told the Exile was a punishment for disobedience. Thus the need for a history arose—to show how God punished their “ancestors” for apostasy, and rewarded them for being obedient and faithful. The colonisation of Palestine by the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Persians were judgements by God and His punishment, but the Persians claimed to be God’s saviours, sent to redeem His wayward people. It was a brilliant policy, so successfully executed after some initial trouble that its consequences are bigger 2500 years later than Cyrus could ever have anticipated.

“The Deuteronomic historiographical principle can be depicted as a theology of the two ways: do good and be blessed—do evil and be cursed”. It is a “moralistic, controlling and opportunistic interpretation, that favours groups in power or in search of power over people”. This was happening in the Persian period, the dualistic Persian being clear in Douglas Knight’s words, and who but the Persian kings were the people that wanted power over the inhabitants of the Levant at that time? They did it by placing in power a foreign ruling class, whose own security depended upon absolute fealty to their Persian protectors, but otherwise whose future depended on their controlling the native inhabitants of the land they had been granted—the Canaanites.



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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 3. Ezra & The Law**  
**Deuteronomic History and the Prophets**

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### Deuteronomic History

The *Former Prophets* equate with the Deuteronomic History. The Deuteronomistic History was noted first by Martin Noth. It stands for the work of a school of authors who wrote what Noth saw was a coherent history from *Deuteronomy* (except chapters 32-34) to *2 Kings*—*Joshua*, *Judges*, *1 and 2 Samuel*, *1 and 2 Kings*—books that follow the criteria of *Deuteronomy* and are likely therefore to spring from the same source.

The Deuteronomic History introduces David, Saul and Solomon but depicts the monarchy as corrupt, blasphemous and always bringing misfortune to the people. Needless to say, biblical scholars have had many views and formulated many theories about it, most, if not all of which accept it at its own value. However, most of these scholars will accept that these books have one main theme that they will not dispute—that they express the central view of Deuteronomy, that disobedience of the law will bring punishment by God, and particularly the withdrawal of the gift of the land.

The chronology is coherent, the language, style and sentence structure is characteristic, the text is periodically broken by speeches by the leading participants summarising the story so far, and looking ahead, and the author's purpose is clear and consistent—to condemn apostasy and warn about its dire consequences for the people.

Under the influence of Noth, the books of *Kings* were considered coherent enough to have been written complete, by a single author, but few scholars honestly accept that view today—they are made up of several layers of redaction. Modern exegesis dates the “Historic Books” of the Bible (*Genesis* to *2 Kings*) from the time of “Exile.” They originated after the exile in the Persian period.

The author of *Isaiah* saw the victory of Cyrus over Babylonia as punishment of the Babylonians by Yehouah for abducting the leading Israelites. But Cyrus himself had a different view. He declared to the Babylonians that their own god, Marduk, had punished them for their own sins. This is interesting in several ways. It shows that the worshipper of any god will claim historical events as interventions of their own deity when it suits them. It shows Cyrus as saying to the Babylonians exactly what he said to the Jews—their own god would punish them if they resisted the policies of the king of kings. It shows him using religion for his own purposes, just as he did with Judaism. It equates Marduk with Yehouah in that the God of Heaven favoured the Persian king, the agent through which He acted on earth. The objective of the historians the Persian king despatched to various places was to get over this message.

### The Purpose of the Deuteronomists

The Persian kings did not want to restore local kings but hoped to control people by religious authority—the God of Heaven had his reign on earth in the person of the king of kings—the Persian king. The present recension

of the Jewish scriptures is even later—from the time of the Maccabees. Indeed the findings at Qumran show that they were still being written in the first century BC.

So, Noth is correct that there is a clear cohesion about the Deuteronomic History but wrong to conclude that it implies a single author. The cohesion is conditioned by the unity of purpose of the books, which cannot be lost provided that each editor had the same central purposes. Editors might have intended to add, or clarify or repair when the original was damaged or lost, but even if they had different minor themes, so long as the central themes remained those of the Deuteronomist, the books would remain coherent. After a few generations, say 100 years, the Deuteronomic History was accepted by all as God's word, and future editors would have been unwilling to alter it.

The messages conveyed in the books were those of the Deuteronomist. The northern kingdom, Israel, disappeared from history because its kings, from Jeroboam I on, were sinners. Sin is, of course, not any particular moral wrongdoing but simply disobedience to Yehouah and apostasy. The name "Israel" signifies those who worshipped El. By contrast, the southern kingdom of Judah was treated favourably by the redactors because its kings were considered of the line of David and mostly aspired not to sin. The few who did sin eventually brought "the exile" to the people of Judah as a punishment. The name "Judah" signifies those who worshipped Yehouah.

In these myths, Israel is the embodiment of Canaanite apostasy from Yehouah and His laws, laws that were only introduced in the Persian period as Ezra admits. These new and largely alien laws were justified by re-writing Canaanite history. Eventually, even the people of Yehud had been wicked enough to attract the wrath of Yehouah in the sack of Jerusalem and the exile, but the reward of a righteous "remnant" was to be returned by the Persians as colonists. Apparently, Israel had been too wicked to be returned, because they stood for all the people who worshipped the traditional gods of Canaan and not the instrument of Persian foreign policy, Yehouah. *Kings* pretends that Yehouah struggled throughout history against a wilful and unworthy people and failed, so He had to destroy them! Nearly the same happened to the Jews, but they were not so unworthy and were saved by a remnant, those sent as colonists from Syria to start up the temple state of Yehud. Nevertheless, these myths signified that their position was precarious indeed, so they had better be exemplary people. Attached to this theme of God's punishment for disobedience is the eulogising of the "prophets."

## Prophets

The supposed act of reading the future was common in the Fertile Crescent in the first millennium BC and even before. Seers advised kings and lesser ones gave oracles to anyone willing to pay, like fortune tellers today. They were astrologers, Chaldaeans, Magi, oracles and prophets. In texts from Phoenicia, Aram (Syria), Ammon, Anatolia, Emar, Mari, Assyria and Babylon, prophets appear of either sex. Only Egypt seems to lack the equivalent position, but they had their schools of life which might have included such a function.

The ancient astrologers of Mesopotamia were a profession of advisors to the king and the country, looking to the skies for omens, studying not just the rising and setting of stars and the motions of the planets, notably the moon, but also meteorological phenomena like clouds and and thunder.

The *Dead Sea Scrolls* show that, at the turn of the era, some Jews were immensely interested in such matters,

and their absence in the scriptures looks odd. The Maccabees fought the northern Greeks of Babylon, and, it seems rejected their astrological magic when they repaired the damage of the sacred books in the war. The Essenes however, remained loyal to the original Persian forms of Judaism, including astrology. They called themselves prophets!

Prophets claimed skills like these and more mundane ones like interpreting dreams and examining entrails. Biblicists find it difficult to call astrologers and augurers prophets, so they call them just oracles, or even “oracular speakers,” so that the faithful will not get them mixed up, but they all had essentially the same job. The scriptures note ecstatic prophets ( *1 Sam* 10:5), and ordinary people could be prophets, if *Amos* is to be believed.

The scriptural Huldah is a female prophet ( *2 Kg* 22:14), supposedly called “Weasel,” when her name probably signifies “Beautiful Disc.” Her husband is Shallum, looking like a variant of Solomon (Shalim), the evening sun, and therefore perhaps Huldah meant the moon. She had to be visited to elicit her prophecy, making her sound like Python at Delphi. Otherwise female prophets seem to have been expurgated from the scriptures, if others were originally present, by later biblical editors determined to take patriarchy to its limit. *Ezekiel*, a late work, condemns female prophets ( *Ezek* 13:17-23), so the direction was clear.

## Propagandists

About the time of Cyrus the Persian, some kings had realized that the prophecies of these men could be used as propaganda, demoralizing enemy countries and arousing patriotic fervour, as the case might be. It was a powerful psychological weapon. There is evidence of the Persians using this method in Babylon and in Anatolia. If biblicists suppressed their kneebending inclinations in favour of looking at the Jewish scriptures as historians, they would find the scriptures were excellent historical evidence that the Persians did the same in Yehud. So, prophets became under the Persians, if not before, a propaganda machine. Baruch Halpern sees the prophets as essentially agents of a totalitarian state agenda (J S Cooper and G M Schwartz (eds), *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century* ). If there is any distinction between prophecy and divination, it is only that prophecy assumed this propaganda role, and thus became less mechanical and more attuned to the political needs of the hour.

Prophets were the spokespeople of different “political parties,” one of which would have favoured the foreigners. The Jewish scriptures could not be clearer that the party of those loyal to the practice of worshipping Baal, had their own prophets, and so did worshippers of Asherah, the goddess ( *1 Kg* 18:19). The scriptures are clear that there were schools of prophets which disagreed, but the impression clerics give is that they were like the Greek schools of philosophy or the medieval schools of theology.

The record left to future generations is that of the victors, so we have a record of the Persian salvation prophets, those who presented the conquerors as saviours. In the mythical histories of the Jews, the prophets often predict disaster and it comes about, surely proof that the accounts were not written by genuine contemporaries. The kings of Israel, and sometimes Judah, and even the people are often denigrated by the prophets, yet there they are—recorded! If Jews wrote these accounts they did it under Persian hegemony to suit the wishes of their masters. They had only one treaty, called a covenant, with their Persian suzerains, and other alliances and coalitions were forbidden. Oracles against foreign nations were warnings not to think of making them.

The success of the prophets plainly gave them authority, as the scriptures expressly say. It was authority that came from them being on the right side. But the writers who came to write their exploits, or if not them, later elaborators, wanted to show that they always had authority. Hermann Gunkel showed that the original prophecies of the recorded prophets became literature in a complex process. They introduced “call” narratives, and “disputes” among prophets to show they spoke truly.

No one suggests that the prophets did not have opponents but the truth will have been suppressed and lost, and the “disputes” added as fiction. They could be set convincingly in period because pre-Persian societies had their prophets, and to show the propagandist prophets in a suitable historical situation was no difficult task. It suited the Deuteronomic message that their reception was mixed to allow their “apostate” opponents to be highlighted. The original propagandists voiced their view against the other parties, and at some personal risk. Their messages in support of a foreign power were not necessarily well received, not least by the local authorities, so there was a basis in fact for stories of prophetic conflict, and they were retrojected *mutatis mutandis* to past times and places. Conflicts like that of Micaiah and the 400 (1 Kg 22) show the righteous prophet standing up against the odds, an illustrative myth set in the past, but meant to justify the Persian officials called prophets.

It is often poetic, but oracles in many societies from the Delphic Oracles through the Sybilline ones to Nostradamus are often poetry, however crude. Many scriptural prophetic works were refined by skilled poets, and *Ezekiel* might have been completely rewritten or composed anew to replace a lost original. In the literary process, especially when the original purpose was forgotten or had to be hidden, contradictions emerged making prophecy often seem incoherent or abstract, though it is plain enough that the central purpose remains Deuteronomistic.

The role of prophets in the history of appointing and deposing kings can hardly have been that of real prophets who were at the mercy of kings. Amos calls Jeroboam II to order, to Amaziah's horror. Nathan condemns David. Elijah condemned Ahab. Jeremiah condemned Jehoiakim. It is mythology again aimed at puffing the Persian officials. The astrological prophets of Babylon had a precarious existence, depending upon the patronage of the king, who often neglected to reward them, as we know from plaintive letters found on cuneiform tablets. They were also liable to suffer the ultimate penalty if their prophecy was wrong. The scriptures say the same was true of biblical prophets. Jeremiah was threatened and Uriah killed.

The Persian prophets might sometimes have had the power to act directly for the Shahanshah himself, above the head of the local satrap or governor. They were men to be listened to—Hearken to me! P D Miller comments that “such political matters were always ultimately theological,” and *vice versa*, and that is because the tenor of *Deuteronomy* echoes throughout.

The Persians were careful to tell the people who the right prophets were (*Dt* 18:20,22). The prophets of the Persian party could make promises that they knew the Persian chancellery could bring about. Others were false prophets and their fate was death. They were, of course, those who prophesied against Persian rule. Prophets therefore would be careful to prophesy what the Persians wanted.

Popular prophecy, according to J S Holliday Jr, is not attested anywhere else except in Assyria, but the Persians inherited and applied more effectively what they had learnt from being neighbours of the Assyrians for centuries.

Persian archives have been thoroughly destroyed by the Greeks and the Moslems, leaving us with astonishingly little knowledge of the first great world empire, whereas Assyrian records were preserved on clay tablets beneath the desert sands. This is why biblicists have been able to ignore Persia in exploring biblical origins, even though it is plain that Judaism began with the Persians, the only people at that time with an ethical, monotheistic and eschatological religion.

## Concerns of the Prophets

Patrick D Miller, Jr in *Old Testament Interpretation*, summarises the topics addressed by the prophets as:

- ☐ tyranny;
- ☐ injustice and social oppression;
- ☐ military conquest;
- ☐ people directionless in starting a new life;
- ☐ people lamenting their exile;
- ☐ political alliances;
- ☐ apostasy.

There could be hardly a better summary of the concerns that faced the Persian colonists deported from their homes into an alien and hostile environment by their conquerors. They show the propaganda concerns of the prophets, and fit the concept that they were propagandists for a foreign power. Cyrus the Persian used such propaganda, as is an unarguable fact, and we can be sure that, even before the conquest, spokespeople for his pro-Persian parties would have railed against the injustice, oppression and tyranny of native rulers, depicting the conquerors as saviours, and would have recommended the political alliances that favoured the invaders and denigrated others.

They would have painted the foreign take-over as a necessary act ordained by a just god who would favour those who supported Him and punish enemies and apostates, so the best way to avoid hardship, injury and death was to support the just god and His cause. When deportees were moved in as rulers of the new colony, their problems of estrangement alienation and dispiritedness also were addressed. They were faced with the task of building a new life and society in the face of hostility from the local population, while lamenting their exile from their homeland, and their confusion in an unfamiliar place. All of this then is evident in the scriptures, even though the circumstances are sometimes altered into a mythical past, or the exile is rendered ambiguously. Understanding this is the key to understanding “prophecy” in the bible, even though the prophetic works themselves have been substantially altered in later times when Persian requirements no longer pertained.

## Messengers of God

The Hebrew word used for prophet, still used in the Arabic, is “nabi,” a word that it is impossible not to associate with the god, Nebo, the Babylonian equivalent of the Greek god Hermes (Mercury), the messenger of the gods. Prophets are precisely that—messengers of God.

The prophetic oracle is a message... from the divine assembly where the decrees of God are set forth and transmitted as a divine proclamation or message by the prophetic herald: “Thus said the Lord.”

The prophet came to speak... as an emissary of the heavenly assembly to the covenant people who were in league with the deity Yehouah.

Or, to be less mythological, as an emissary from of the Persian court to the vassal people whose universal god, Yehouah, acknowledged the Persian king as his agent on earth. This heavenly assembly appears in these monotheistic religions unequivocally (1 Kg 22:17-23; Isa 6; Jer 23:16-22), and prophets would describe a sight of it as proof of their authenticity. The executive assembly was in reality the Persian court, but the theory of the universal god of heaven was that the earth reflected what went on in heaven, and so the Persians actually presented their own court as the heavenly one. The Persian king was God's khalif on earth, so what came from God came from the Shahanshah. The Persian kings never claimed to be gods themselves, but effectively they were God! Heaven spoke through the prophet but the rules that emerged were those of the Persian king. Yes, there were prophets in the ancient near east before the Persian period but mainly they were court officials engaged as advisors to the king, as the scriptures show. The popular prophets, who were really propagandists might have appeared in the Assyrian period, but most of the biblical narratives about them were mythical anachronistic retrogressions of the Persian prophets, whose task was to urge obedience to the regulations of the universal god—in practice the laws of the Medes and Persians.

Scholars accept, in Miller's words, "the prophetic insistence on justice and righteousness was rooted in the covenant traditions of Yehouahism." What they are incapable of understanding is that gods are inventions of the human imagination and are incapable of forming covenant relationships with anybody. Covenants and treaties are made between people! Even though the mythical history of the bible is less credible than Santa Claus, they believe it as true and fail to see the real history in it. The covenant relationship the scriptures speak of was with Persia in the fifth century not a transcendental being at the time of Noah, Abraham, Moses or anyone else. That is the mythological basis used to justify the covenant with the masters of the Jews, the Persians.

## Prophecy

The rabbis believe *Kings* is written by Jeremiah (*Babylonian Talmud, Baba bathra*, 15a.). These biblical prophets uttered warnings not to apostatize to the kings and increasingly in the biblical chronology to the people. Prophets in the Persian period were propagandists, and the authors of the original scriptures written by the Persians wanted to establish them as people to be heard with respect as messengers of Yehouah! So, the history depicts the prophets of Yehouah as repeatedly warning the people and their kings. The archetypal prophet was Elijah, whose very name ("My God is Yehouah") declares his purpose, as names often do in the scriptures, though most believers either do not realize it, or take it as a miracle! Even rulers had to obey the prophets in these cautionary tales, declaring in effect that the ultimate ruler, the Shahanshah, did himself, and that local rulers had better do also—though they were never kings as such.

R R Wilson, in an article in *Old Testament Interpretation*, says that the themes of the Deuteronomists were not "particularly prophetic." He is ambiguous, but it is an astonishing claim if he means to say that they were not concerned with the prophets. Obeying God is the *sine qua non* of the prophets, and, in practice, obedience meant obeying God's law! *Deuteronomy* was God's law, so the Deuteronomic authors of the *Former*



*Prophets* meant these books to give reason for obeying it.

The Deuteronomic History is not interested in prophecy as a profession or in any other way other than that prophets carried God's messages and should be heard but too often were ignored. The message not the messengers is ultimately the theme of the Deuteronomic Historians, and in this sense, it might be possible to agree with Wilson that these authors had little interest in "prophecy," but Yehouah's prophets were depicted as right, and their enemies and detractors as wrong.

Walter Dietrich saw an interest in prophecy in *Kings*, and attributed it to a particular editor that he thought he could date to within a few decades. He was at least a century too early, because biblical scholars often find themselves omniscient—doubtless led by God. At least Dietrich saw different editors at work. A F Anthony finds a ninth century prophecy primer for trainee prophets in *Kings*! All of us need only read the *Janet and John of Prophecy* to become professional prophets!

Biblicists can fill supposedly learned tomes with unadulterated garbage for the same reason that computer programmers have the cautionary acronym GIGO, "Garbage In, Garbage Out." Their initial beliefs are fairy tales and, since nothing serves as an external standard for their empty speculations, they can publish any rubbish they can get away with. The principle conditions are to have a respectable academic address, to couch it in the suitably pious received style of biblicists, to dot it with Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic words to prove you are indeed a scholar, and cite as many biblicist authorities as you can fit in, whether relevant to your argument or not. Adding thus to the quagmire of biblical "knowledge" will earn you respect from your peers, possibly a DD and many will imagine a place in heaven!

Robert Wilson points out quite simply that scholars must first decide how they will recognize a prophetic editor in the Deuteronomic History before they run off to look for one. One such imagined criterion is that the subject matter is prophecy or prophets. It seems that only prophets could write about these things. Another is use of language peculiar to the prophets, but there is no agreement on any such language because others who were not prophets also used "prophetic" phrases. The language is in any case largely rendered uniform through the recognizably Deuteronomic language of the Deuteronomic editors. They use idioms and words that punctuate these books throughout, and clearly identifiable blocks of prophetic work are not convincingly separable. The Deuteronomists talk about prophecy in essentially the same style as they address other subjects.

References to prophecy and prophets are inherent in the Deuteronomists' text and not an added layer. The invective threat of punishment in *Kings* was thought by Campbell and Dietrich to mark out a prophetic layer but it is not found in the accepted work of the prophets! The central purpose of both the Deuteronomists and the prophets was the same—to warn against disobeying God. The common purpose conditions the textual content and blurs any differences in origin.

## **Fulfilment of Prophecy**

These books were aimed at those who worshipped Canaanite gods and so were accused of apostasy from Yehouah, the one true god. Different threats were doubtless directed at the different gods depending on the nature of their worship, but the character of the universal god of heaven shines through, showing the earliest period these works could have been written—after the Persian conquest. Much of the accepted prophetic corpus

is later than the Persian period and edited or written to suit the Jewish religion as it evolved in the Hellenistic period. Prophecy is therefore not theologically consistent, a sign either that God is incoherent or that these works have nothing to do with any god but with the evolution of men's thoughts.

A theme of *Kings* is fulfilment of prophecy. The altar at Bethel (1 Kg 12:1-10) has a prophecy against it fulfilled in Josiah's reforms (2 Kg 23:15-18). Bethel might have been an early sanctuary of the Persian colonists, but evidently to El as the universal god, a decision later changed. Josiah, a variation of Joshua ("Yehouah saves"), is chosen as the king who rejects this "apostasy" in the salvation history. Other fulfilled prophecies are against the early kings of Israel, about whom nothing or little is known other than what biblical mythology tells us. They are deposed or their dynastic line ends for unknown sins:

- ❑ Ahijah of Shiloh prophesies the end of Jeroboam's dynasty in Israel (1 Kg 14:1-16; 1 Kg 15:27-30).
- ❑ The end of Baasha's dynasty is prophesied (1 Kg 16:1-4; 1 Kg 16:11-14).
- ❑ Elijah condemns Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kg 21:20-24; 1 Kg 22:37-38; 2 Kg 9:26-37; 2 Kg 10:17), each being punished and Ahab's dynasty ending.
- ❑ Elijah prophesies the death of Ahaziah (2 Kg 1:2-4; 2 Kg 1:17-18).
- ❑ God, peculiarly and unexpectedly, restricts Jehu's dynasty Himself (2 Kg 15:12).

Some prophecies are mentioned in passing with no mention of the prophecies themselves, such as those which could have averted the fall of Samaria (2 Kg 17:13) and then of Judah (2 Kg 24:2). In this prophesying, it is Israel who is normally hit rather than Judah, showing that Judah was seen as those who obeyed Yehouah while Israel stood for the "apostates" who did not. The worshippers of Canaanite gods were punished while those who worshipped Yehouah, nominally at least in the refinement of the history, were not, or less so. When the battle against the "diva" gods was won, only the worshippers of Yehouah remained and the second part of 2 *Kings* deals only with Judah, and contains no prophecies other than the obscure reference to the fall of the state.

## Israel and Judah

Much of the rest of the prophetic narrative relates to the authentication of the state of Israel as approved by the prophets but remaining negligent in religious matters. The prophets are shown as directly involved in good government, and attempt to give them a worthy history to legitimize their role as propagandists in Persian times. Omri (Khumri) is known in history from Assyrian tablets, and the Mesha stone, and might have been the historical founder of the Samarian state, but kings such as Jeroboam I are unknown, except in the bible, and will be as mythical as David and Solomon.

Jeroboam, the successor of Solomon, is a key figure in the history written in the bible because it is in his reign when the pharaoh of Egypt, Sheshonk, attacked and destroyed the power of the Israelite kings supposedly built up under David and Solomon. Jeroboam was a commoner before he became king and yet his detailed history is still known and reported in the scriptures. The supposed sources of these accounts are presumed to have been sources mentioned in the bible itself, such as the *Scroll of the Acts of the Kings of Israel*. Yet the examples of such books as we have from much more powerful states like Assyria are extremely terse, and have even been described as written in a shorthand, they are so abbreviated. Not only that, but obviously the acts recorded were important ones to the state and not the domestic history of usurpers before they became king. The bible

has the accounts in the detail of a Barbara Taylor Bradford novel. It is a romance.

The contemporary of Jeroboam was Sheshonk I (946-913 BC), and Hiram of Tyre preceded him by only a few years as the contemporary of Solomon. Jeroboam I ruled 931-910 BC (attested in the bible). Hiram I of Tyre ruled 970-936 (attested by Josephus and inscriptions). Jeroboam II (794-754 BC) lived at the same time as Tiglath-pileser III as did Hiram II of Tyre in about 740 BC, both being mentioned in tribute lists. By coincidence, a king of Egypt also called Shoshenk ruled from 773 to 735 BC, and so was a contemporary of Jeroboam II and Hiram II. The Hiram seems historical, as do Jeroboam II and the Shoshenks, but nothing other than the bible attests to Solomon and Jeroboam I.

The kindest interpretation, given no better evidence of such mighty kings as Solomon and Jeroboam, is that the author has confused the two Hiram and Shoshenks and thought that Jeroboam was the contemporary of the earlier ones. If it was a deliberate error, it was done knowing that few people would ever find out, or would be able to distinguish different kings with the same name, and those who did would not want to tell. The ancient author was correct in this assumption.

## Kings

The whole of *Kings* has the theme of God punishing sinners to lead up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the "Exile" in preparation for the "Return." The "Return" was the start of Jewish history.

*Kings* must have been written after 561 BC when Evil-merodach acceded to the throne of Babylon and Jehoiachin was released from captivity. That is evident and uncontroversial. But commentators fatuously argue the book could not have been published after 539 BC, because the author omitted reference to Babylon falling, and the "return" to Palestine during the reign of Cyrus the Persian. The same commentators say that the history is a sacred history, and not factual in the sense that a social, economic or military history would be.

Thus the founder of Samaria is dismissed in a few verses, Menahem is shown in a bad light though the country seems to have been peaceful and prospered under his sensible policy of submission to the Assyrians. Uzziah was supposedly king of Judah for 50 years but is only briefly mentioned. The purpose of the author is to condemn the people as serial apostates, and rebels from the rule of God. His aim was not to show that they had been forgiven by God allowing them to return, but to realize that punishment still awaited them if they continued to apostatize in future. The author therefore omitted the return as counter to his aim, and the book could easily have been written a hundred or more years later. It was.

To suggest the book was written during the "exile" is fantastic. The fantasy has it that the deported Jews lived in freedom and, within fifty years, luxury, with leisure time to seek out and consult the annals of their former kingdom and write an extended history before they, by surprise, with the unexpected victory of the Persians, were able to return to their own barren land. No doubt Jews and Christians will see the finger of God in this, but scholars ought to see something quite different—mythologizing!

In reality, the ruling elite of the Judahites were sent as captives abroad with no prospect of returning. These deportations were permanent, not merely a sentence. Deported people were put in difficult situation, administering a distant province as a foreign elite, but disliked by the natives they were put in charge of. The

people deported were clever and skilled, rulers, and they were made rulers of an alien country. It was meant to be a precarious existence that occupied their time fully, preventing them from plotting uprisings themselves for fear and lack of native support, but, while they ruled successfully for the Persian kings, they were rewarded and protected, and so had the chance of being prosperous, even if unpopular. The “returning Jews” were in just that boat themselves, being in reality the deported rulers of other Persian conquests.

The language of *Kings* belongs unmistakably to later than the Persian conquest. Many words and phrases in the book do not appear elsewhere in scripture. The language of *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel* and *Kings* closely resemble each other, and there is the rabbinic tradition that Jeremiah wrote *Kings*. The language of *Kings* and of *Jeremiah* seem so similar that the authors were either the same or one deliberately imitated the other. Characteristic similarities show it:

- ☐ hardened their neck (2 *Kg* 17:14; Jer 7:26)
- ☐ vanity and became vain (2 *Kg* 17:15; Jer 2:5)
- ☐ cast them out of His sight (2 *Kg* 17:20; Jer 7:15)
- ☐ for a prey and for a spoil (2 *Kg* 21:14; Jer 30:16)

There are many others, yet *Kings* does not mention Jeremiah in its account of the last days of Judah, and he is only mentioned twice in *Chronicles* (2 *Chr* 35:25; 36:12). As one commentator, James E Smith, remarks:

The role which Jeremiah played during those crucial days was so significant that it is hard to conceive of any impartial, not to mention pious and prophetic, historian ignoring both his name and his work.

Indeed, that seems to be what the redactor of *Chronicles* thought, and felt obliged to fill the gap, even if inadequately, but this biblicist commentator can come to no sensible conclusions—the prophetic author of *Kings* was just modest.

It is unlikely, if not impossible, that Jeremiah lived in the times claimed internally in *Jeremiah* and yet wrote *Kings*. Jeremiah would have been too old. His prophetic years supposedly began in the thirteenth year of Josiah, 627 BC. If *Kings* could not have been completed before 561 BC, sixty-six years later, Jeremiah would have been about eighty-six. It is possible that such an old man would have started writing a book of history, but this, with the linguistic evidence, shows he did not.

Jeremiah can have had nothing to do with this fall of Jerusalem, but a later one, to the Persians during a rebellion, and that therefore is when he lived. Redactors have conflated the two occasions because they had no genuine accounts of the original fall of Jerusalem after perhaps 200 years and so they used a more recent seige. Moreover, scholars think *Kings* was written in Babylon, and Jeremiah never went there, but the author evidently did:

- ☐ He knew what happened in the court of Evil-merodach in Babylon.
- ☐ *Kings* does not mention the remnant of Jews that fled to Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem.
- ☐ In 1 *Kings* 4:24 the region west of the Euphrates River (Syria and the Levant) is called, literally, “beyond the river.” if this is just a relative reference then the author of *Kings* must have been east of the Euphrates, probably in Babylon. More likely however, the reference is to the name of the satrapy, Abarnahara, which

means the same, but shows the book was written in the Persian period.

The translators of the Jewish scriptures have constantly tried to keep the name of the Persian satrapy out of the text because it is a giveaway, but “beyond the river” occurs frequently. It mostly literally translates Abarnahara. Throughout *Kings* are passages in which the author reflects upon what he is relating and interprets it in the light of his overall theme. This is the Deuteronomistic framework which gives coherence and purpose to the book. The author is committed to the concept of a centralized sanctuary, at Jerusalem. *Kings* rails against the high places, and the book also attacks the infiltration of Baal worship into the kingdoms.

Another concern of the editor of *Kings* is the monarchy of Judah. A late and substantial redaction portrays David, the mythical first noble king of Judah, as a God-fearing, ideal king (1 Kg 11:33, 38; 14:8), and the standard by which all the kings were judged. Kings of Israel are secondary and incorrigible anyway. The reason is that Israel, Samaria, no longer existed. Only Judah remained. Archaeological material for the study of Judah after 722 BC is abundant, not before, when the abundant material pertains to Samaria. Of the forty kings of Israel and Judah who are named in *Kings*, only fourteen are named in the inscriptions thus far unearthed by archaeologists, and none of the Jewish kings are early.

The reigns of the kings of the two countries do not match up without fudges, and unlikely presumptions. Josiah was born when Amon was sixteen, and Jehoiakim was born when Josiah was fourteen. Some have alleged that Hezekiah was born to Ahaz when the latter was eleven! Athaliah, queen of Judah, and Jehu, king of Israel, began to reign the same day. The city of Samaria fell in the sixth year of Hezekiah (2 Kg 18:10). Athaliah to Hezekiah Year 6 adds up to 165 yrs. Jehu to the fall of Samaria adds up to 143 yrs. Co-regencies are specifically indicated only on two occasions (1 Kg 1:34, 35; 2 Kg 15:5).

Coregency was the ancient means of guaranteeing succession and was not unusual, but Biblicists use it to settle the problem of dates—they reckon arbitrary years of coregency in the total of years attributed to both kings. If a father and son shared the rule for ten years, that ten years would be counted in the total number of both kings' reigns. It just becomes a question then of juggling the reigns and regencies to get the desired numbers. Problem solved! But the dates are conjecture.

Most of the Judahite kings are seen by the Deuteronomists favourably, unless they had a Samaritan connexion or refused to destroy the “High Places.” For the kings of Judah, only Hezekiah (2 Kg 18:3-7) and Josiah (2 Kg 22:2) are mentioned uncritically. Asa (1 Kg 15:11-14), Jehoshaphat (1 Kg 22:43), Jehoash (2 Kg 12:2-3), Azariah (2 Kg 15:3-4), and Jotham (2 Kg 15:34-35) are treated with some favour, while the other kings of Judah are condemned as evil (2 Kg 8:18, 27; 21:2, 20).

The “High Places” look likely to mean Canaanite shrines, but could refer mythically to early shrines of the colonists, whether to El (originally) or to Yehouah, when the decision was taken to centralize worship in Jerusalem. Hezekiah is shown as the first king to address this issue but both he and Josiah look like retrogressed salvation kings—they are depicted as introducing Persian reforms anachronistically to give a spurious historical legitimacy to the reforms when they were really introduced new by Ezra in the fifth century BC. The Deuteronomists give Hezekiah unequalled praise for his “reform,” so much so that he is the Messiah in some Jewish traditions. Since the scriptures depict Cyrus as the Messiah, the two are equated. Hezekiah's reforms are those of the Persian kings. I Provan suggests that *Kings* once ended here with no reference to the

fall of Jerusalem. Instead the Persian colonists were the immediate successors of the mythical reformers in Hezekiah's reign, and the reforms seemed continuous. Some later editor thought there was an omission and filled it.

The kings of Israel are unanimously condemned in *Kings* for not doing what was right in the sight of the Lord (1 Kg 15:26, 34; 16:25). The condemnation even falls on Jehu, the greatest defender of Yehouah in the north (2 Kg 10:29-31), though it is mollified. It is no accident of history or God that Judahite kings were often reforming ones while Israelite kings were apostatizing ones. Yehud was being set up among people who worshipped Canaanite gods. The history depicted worshippers of Canaanite gods as apostatizing from their proper god, Yehouah. Among this phony historical condemnation of the intransigence of the people, some hope was needed. So the righteous people who remained true to Yehouah were saved. The main prophet of *Kings* (2 Kg 18-20) is Isaiah, meaning "Salvation is Yehouah." The Yehudim (Jews) were those who worshipped Yehouah and Yehud (Judah) was their country. Besides those already mentioned, Asa ("Salvation") is a reforming king (1 Kg 15:11-15) and so is Jehoash (2 Kg 12:2-16) meaning "Yehouah Saves". The even more favourable account in *Chronicles* gives more good Jewish kings.

## Foreign Alliances

Another theme is that of foreign alliances. Jehoshaphat did not remove the high places, but also made a treaty with the king of Israel (1 Kg 22:44). Indeed, Jehoshaphat seems to be a vassal of the Israelite king (1 Kg 22:1-4). The purpose of this being mentioned in the history, whether it is true or not, is to warn the Jews, whose suzerain was Persia, not to make covenants with other countries. It was a requirement of ancient covenant treaties and this is a reminder of it.

Jehoram (2 Kg 8:16-19) forms a treaty with Israel and so did Ahaziah (2 Kg 8:25-29), and Jehoash, a forty year king (signifying God's favour) paid all the wealth of the temple to Hazael of Damascus in tribute. Ahaz similarly settled with the Tiglath-pileser of the Assyrians (2 Kg 16:1-20), but he was also an apostate. In contrast, good king Hezekiah apparently rebelled against the Assyrians and was rewarded. Neither *Isaiah* nor *Kings* favour foreign alliances, but want the people to have faith in Yehouah providing they are righteous. This suited the Shahanshah but he could hardly have viewed favourably a successful rebellion against the foreigner.

The Deuteronomist always wanted the threat of God's wrath for wrongdoing, yet here is a promise of God's eternal protection of Jerusalem. It seems unlikely that this could be the work of the original Persian authors, and the rebellion might be a later addition in Maccabaeen times, the narrative at this point becoming conspicuously layered (2 Kg 18:13-19:37). The story of Sennacherib's invasion appears three times, the first one merely in brief. The Persian one must have been that of Hezekiah following the advice of the salvation prophet, Isaiah, and securing the safety of Jerusalem (2 Kg 18:7-19:9,36). The original author probably meant the Assyrians to represent the Persians as foreign conquerors, and meant foreign treaties to be respected, but a later editor thought it wrong or dangerous to encourage any foreign alliances, and God's destruction of the Assyrian army was added, perhaps even signifying the destruction of Persia.

## Some Prophets

According to R P Carroll, the prophets were "invented." The post-Persian editors of the prophetic works did not



understand the prophecies of the earlier practical period of Jewish formation, and were swayed by the subsequent evolution of the cultus and its mythology in the Greek period, so they introduced errors of transcription and irrelevant and misleading “explanatory” glosses.

*Zephaniah* seems to have been composed in the time of the seventh century reforms of Josiah, king of Judah, but its awareness of a world wide judgement and restoration of Jerusalem betrays its origin in the Persian period to rational minds.

*Isaiah* seems to be set towards the end of the eighth century when the Assyrians were subjecting Palestine but the identification of Second and Third Isaiah as identifiably later, and many “interpolations” in the first 39 chapters, show it to be a production of the Persian period when the temple state of Yehud was “saved” from extinction. Words written three centuries before turn out to be prophetic of the fifth century colonists building Yehud. They were contemporary texts written to encourage them and give them a spurious history.

*Amos* seems to be set even before *Isaiah*, in the middle of the eighth century. Amos (“The People are Saved”) begins by being a prophet of salvation but ends being a prophet of judgement. Biblicists accept the book’s own date even though the book has plain signs it was written later. It is because of later redaction, they say, and doubtless editors did work on it after the original writer, but it was not written when it claims anyway. Indeed, even if there were a book about a man called Amos written in the eighth century, what we have now was written much later. Once it is accepted that the book was actually written later and is not contemporary with its contents, it could be purely fictional, merely set at a time in the past.

Believers and biblicists will rarely consider this, for the simple reason that they have already convinced themselves that the bible *must* be “the word of the Lord.” They end up in a conspiracy of lies to uphold their God and His holy word, as they see them. That is just what has happened for centuries, and continues today, though their line is untenable. Liars write for other liars, refusing to think what is for them the unthinkable and refusing to voice any doubt out loud for fear of losing their admission to God’s balmy place. They happily explain to us God’s Truth knowing but not admitting it to be lies. They call themselves biblical scholars, thus reducing scholarship to deceit. They know what they want to be the core of these works, and do not mind arbitrarily rejecting what reveals it as false, called the “interpolations” of later editors. Lo! They find just what they expected—the utterances of an eighth century prophet. Mention of the Assyrians prove the time as the eighth century. So the author of a play called Julius Caesar must have been a first century BC Roman not an Elizabethan English playwright.

Amos is a defender of the poor in a supposedly rich kingdom, and a critic of the king and the national cultus, said to be based at Bethel, a place that archaeology cannot find at that time. Amos prophesies that the kingdom would be swept away. It was indeed! The picture is written as a mirror of what happened to Judah, which the Persian claimed to be reversing, thus saving the people. That is the very meaning of the name, Amos. A miracle, apparently. Amos issues a whole series of oracles not just against Israel and Judah, but against the “nations” who strangely are those that constitute the Persian satrapy of Abarnahara. Each begins with, “Thus said Yehouah” showing that Yehouah was meant to be the god of all of these nations. He was the god of all of the people of Abarnahara—the Hebrews!

## **Imaginary History**

The Deuteronomists and later editors did not necessarily write pure fiction. They did not have to invent all of these sagas, but had material to work from that they edited in such a way that the aims of the returning priests were fulfilled. They put their own extensive gloss on the fragments of legend they already had, recasting them as allegories of the struggles of the foreigners deported into Israel by the Persians, and later editors fleshed it all out with fiction based on events they knew such as the guerilla war of the Maccabees against the Greeks. That is, new legends were added by the Hasmonaean editors to give the newly founded free state of Judah a history.

What began as an instrument of Persian foreign policy finished up as an imaginary history to found the national identity of the Jews when the national state was set up as independent by the Maccabees. Inventing history might have exceeded the boundaries of Jewish piety by then, but taking the ragbag of legends and romances they had and reworking them to suit their own aims did not. Thus, the history of the mixed peoples of Palestine was revised to give them a national and ethnic identity to be proud of, to show the hand of the god of the second temple, Yehouah, behind that history and to show the Israelites apostatizing as ever.

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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 3. Ezra & The Law

## Joshua, Josiah and the Deuteronomic Historian

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### The Honesty of Biblicists

The whole of the subject of the “Conquest” of Canaan is infected with a mass of rabid speculation described by Jewish and Christian commentators as “scholarship”. The minutest details of the texts of *Joshua*, *Judges* and *Numbers* is examined and leprous theories of absolutely no basis or consequence are discussed in “learned” biblical works that seem to exist merely to show that the bible is so important that people cannot stop writing about it. The trouble is they rarely want to write the truth about it.

The “scholars” often speculate about utterly different periods of “conquest” being unable to agree on an accepted paradigm. That is thought of as a blessing of God because it allows them to write endless masses of unadulterated tripe and unforgiveable mendacity for the benefit of the gullible nod-heads in the churches, and continue to draw large salaries for doing nothing even slightly useful.

Joel Drinkard explains to us why the exodus might have been in 1440 BC. *1 Kings* 6:1 says the Solomonic temple was built in the 480th year after the exodus. “Scholars” date the temple of Solomon to c 960 BC, even though there is no historical evidence of either the temple or of Solomon. It is all taken from the bible, and so, the conquest must have been about 1440 BC, on this biblical evidence. Drinkard thinks this fits some history! The rise of Joseph to prominence in Egypt could be explained as related to the Hyksos rule when Asiatics ruled Lower Egypt for 150-200 years until c 1550 BC, although the narrative gives no impression that the pharaoh is anything other than Egyptian. The new king who knew not Joseph (*Ex* 1:8) must have succeeded at the expulsion of the Hyksos about 1550 BC with the restoration of native Egyptian rule.

John Garstang dated a destruction level at Jericho to c 1400 BC, possibly a sign of Joshua’s conquest, but Kathleen Kenyon, re-excavating Jericho in the 1950s, using meticulous stratigraphic methodology, showed this destruction layer dated to c 1560 BC, too early for the time of Joshua, regardless of the dates proposed for the conquest. In the thirteenth century when the walls were supposed to have been falling down, despite Drinkard, according to the best guesses of the biblicists, the town was uninhabited, apart from a tramp and his family! W F Albright, faith in the inerrant unshaken, declared the evidence had slipped from the top of the tell by erosion. That would leave evidence in the scree. There was none.

Anyway, Albright challenged 1440 as the date of the exodus. He put it about 1290 BC and the conquest at 1250-1200 BC, based on the archaeology of Palestine, which he decided showed widespread destruction around 1250-1200 BC. It seemed to mark the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age. Albright, Wright, Bright and others adopted this dating scheme. The transition was evidence of the entry of the Hebrews into the land under Joshua’s leadership, presumably because these slaves understood the use of iron, but no one else did! They thought the Israelites in Canaan had taken with them a distinctive new architectural structure, the four room house, and a distinctive new pottery form, the collared rim jar. The 1290 BC date eclipsed the 1440 BC date for the exodus. William Dever says:

Only one thing is certain, and that is that the scant Egyptian evidence at least points unanimously to a 13th century BC date for an Israelite “exodus”, if any.

Albright offers a brazen example of biblicist trickery when he says:

Since Israel was already menacing the Canaanite towns in force before the following year, according to the famous Israel stela of Marniptah, we may safely date the fall of Canaanite Lachish in 1220 or shortly thereafter.

Merneptah is now conventionally dated to 1212-1202 BC, but apart from that, any student who made such gross assumptions and deductions in history or archaeology would be failed by their examiners. A professor who said any such thing would be sacked, or quietly retired if it were considered a failure of the mind through age. Albright was a famous and highly respected “scholar” of biblical history for half a century. Christians prefer to have their holy scriptures upheld rather than discredited, even if it means accepting deception instead of honesty.

The stela of Merneptah does not say that Israel was menacing Canaanite towns. Albright says it because he believes his bible. The Merneptah stela, if the hieroglyphs for Israel are correctly read, says that Israel was so badly defeated that all its menfolk were wiped out!

Israel (Hieroglyphic determinant: people) is laid waste, his seed are not.  
Hurru (Hieroglyphic determinant: land) is become a widow because of Egypt.

The fact that the Israelites were wiped out confirms the invasion and conquest of Israel by them, according to biblicist logic! And Albright uses this fantasy to date the conquest! The poetic pairing of Israel, a people, with a land called Hurru, left as a widow because her menfolk are dead (a pun of Hurru as the Egyptian word for widow) implies that the Israel of the stela inhabit the Hurrian kingdom, but by this time the Hurrians and Hittites were intermingled and the name was retained only as an alternative name for Canaan. Israel means “Sons of the God El”, a reference to the high god of the Canaanites.



Stele of Merneptah,  
c1202 BC

This is just one example of the way professional Christianity-mongers have duped Christians over thousands of years, and before that how professional Judaism-mongers were duping the Jews. These people should be laughed to derision. They are fakes and liars and do untold harm to the study of near eastern history, yet the universities have whole departments devoted to them. If there are any devoted Jews or Christians out there who value truth as indispensable to the divine will, they will demand that these people are replaced by honest scholars. Needless to say, they will not. Expediency, evidently a synonym for faith, is all that matters to them.

If any of it mattered more widely, these bogus scholars would never have gotten away with it for so long. It does not matter whether the Leah tribes entered from the south or the centre of Palestine, or whether God landed them there by a miracle, because it is all mythology as archaeologists have shown, but evidence will never stop

these “scholars” whirling around and around in their dervish dance of insane biblical justifying. Offer them certain proof that the biblical accounts are mythological and they will not cease their head-banging behaviour.

Why do these sad people, unable to study anything useful, think their God wants to make archaeology tell a different story from their so-called history? Why do they think a god interested in saving people wants to make his holy word incompatible with independent investigation? Father de Vaux, excavator of Khirbet Qumran, confessed:

If the historical faith of Israel is not in a certain way founded in *history*, this faith is erroneous and cannot command my assent.

They are terrified that to accept the plain evidence and reject biblical history as myth will show they lack faith and so God will not admit them to the balmy place. If God is surreptitiously testing their honesty, then they have failed and will end up in a hot place anyway!

## **The Conquest of Canaan**

The Israelites, in the bible, invaded Canaan with their superior religion but were unable to impose it on the native Canaanites for 1000 years until some returned from a fifty year exile in Babylonia. Students of history have many examples of conquests and invasions in which there are two possible outcomes—the culture and religion of the conquerors prevail, or the conquerors, despite themselves, are assimilated to the culture and religion of their subjects. Either process happens quickly. The only significant case, supposed historic, of it not happening quickly, but instead a continuous battle ensuing for centuries is that of the conquest of Canaan as told in the bible. G Garbini notes this as a cause for suspicion although it is no cause in itself for disbelief—it could be a unique instance. But the details of the scriptural account are additional cause for doubt!

Christians believe that Joshua entered Canaan over the Jordan River (*Josh* 3:1-4:13), set up a camp at Gilgal (*Josh* 4:19-24), and from there spoiled Jericho with God’s help, then rampaged over the rest of the country in a series of blitzkrieg attacks that delivered up Canaan for the Israelites (*Josh* 6-11). The war was swiftly concluded. In this campaign, the God of Love had no mercy. The Canaanites were all destroyed, except for the Gibeonites who became perpetual slaves of Israel—drawers of water and hewers of wood. Of the people of Jericho who, until then, had imagined that the city was their own, Joshua “left none remaining but utterly destroyed all that breathed as the Lord God of Israel had commanded (*Josh* 10:40)”.

They utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.

*Josh* 6:21

This is the Christian God at work. The Christian cross is their sword! The biblicist Frank Moore Cross said:

I prefer a complex explanation of the origins of Israel in the land to any of the simple models now being offered.

Yet this—God’s own account in the bible—is a simplistic one! The scriptures themselves testify to the falsehood

of the romanticized accounts in *Joshua* 1-12. *Joshua* 1-12 presents the invasion of Canaan as a military conquest by all twelve tribes acting together. The full narrative, gleaned from *Numbers* and *Judges* as well as *Joshua*, suggests a more complicated process than the swift campaign Joshua conducted with the help of the divine finger stirring humanity's affairs. There was no national campaign of conquest by all the tribes of the nation in alliance. Instead, the land was allocated to the tribes and they occupied them as best they could by infiltration or conquest.

How many Israelite tribes were there? Twelve? In the Jewish scriptures, there are thirteen tribes, although Levi did not have any land and was not "registered", but even then there were thirteen territories because Manasseh had two portions, one east of the Jordan and one west. Moreover, Joseph, who ought to have been a tribe, was not—his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh replaced him when Levi was not "registered". In the first chapter of *Judges*, there are only ten tribes, even though Joseph and his two sons are all among them. Levi, Reuben, Issachar and Gad are not among them. In the *Song of Deborah* (*Jg* 5), there are also only ten tribes, though Manasseh is called Machir, and Gad is called Gilead, and the missing tribes are now Judah, Simeon and Joseph. Later, in the division of the putative royal monarchy into two, the northern kingdom, Israel, has ten tribes, and the southern one only two, Judah and Benjamin, but the country is called Judah, as if Benjamin did not matter or did not really exist. The story of the prophet Ahijah (*1 Kg* 12:20) divides Judah alone from the rest, but the rest consists of only ten tribes, so, it seems, that Benjamin *did not* exist. Nor could Simeon and Reuben have been part of the northern kingdom because they were southern tribes which ought to have been associated geographically with Judah. If the split between the tribes was ideological, as the bible maintains, then Judah would have been surrounded by Israel! In fact, there was no such split until Samaria was finally swallowed up by Assyria, leaving Judah as a "remnant".

When the bible was being written, it does not disguise that Levi was not a tribe, but a caste of priests. Simeon had also disappeared accounting for their curse by Jacob in the myth of his legacy. Simeon also was not blessed by Moses. These actions did not fate or anticipate an outcome but simply registered a fact. When the stories were written the authors had no extant signs of any such tribes!

Indeed, even if these tribes did exist in ancient times, it is hard to see why the different people would have retained their tribal identities when they had merged into the two small nations of Israel and Judah. The bible itself is clear enough that the people intermixed, so why the tribes meant anything other than a place where someone was born, in the sense that an American can call himself a Texan is unclear.

By the time that Israel, known as Samaria, was taken over by the Assyrians, had its own rulers deported and was re-colonised, it covered only the areas allocated to Ephraim and Manasseh. The bible says (*2 Kg* 15:29) that Tiglath-pileser III had conquered all the places supposed to have belonged to the other tribes, and their citizens had already been separately deported, thus cutting down Samaria to a rump, if ever those other places had ever really been occupied by Israelites. The inscriptions found in these northern regions are written in Phœnician, not in the Hebrew dialect.

*Judges* shows that Israel did not capture and occupy all the land (*Jg* 1:1-3:6), the land was not taken quickly but by individual tribes acting essentially independently, or smaller groups of tribes. Judah went up against the Canaanites in Judah's territory (*Jg* 1:3-20), and *Judges* shows Canaanites still living in the land, even offering a theological understanding of it:



God left the Canaanites in the land. Israel was unable to expel or destroy all the Canaanites because of Israel's sin.

*Jg* 2:1-6; 3:1-6

Scattered fragments elsewhere suggest separate expeditions by single tribes or small coalitions. In *Joshua* 8, Israel settles around Shechem with no opposition. Which is it to be? Christians will answer, "All of them", but it seems plain that *Joshua* 1-12 was composed to unite a set of disparate traditions that had previously all been accepted.

What is also remarkable about *Joshua* 1-12 is that it refers exclusively to the territory of Benjamin with only four exceptions, probably glosses, one of them plainly being a marginal note. Everything centres on Gilgal, a place which appears elsewhere in the scriptures associated with Benjaminites like Saul (*1 Sam* 11:1ff), and seems to have been a Benjaminite sanctuary of unknown location. Benjamin seems simply to be an alternative name for Yehud. Yehud is the "Son of the South".

Even *Joshua* is not consistent, and denies that all the land was conquered—the coastal plain was not taken, nor was the lowland heartland of Canaan around the Jezreel valley—the region of Megiddo, Taanach, Beth-Shean (*Josh* 13:1-6; 15:63; 16:10; 17:11-18). Joshua captures Hebron (*Josh* 10:36) but then Caleb has to do it (*Josh* 14:6-15; 15:13-14). Though Joshua's campaign is presented as a huge success, twenty vitally important Canaanite cities could not be defeated. Even Jerusalem was not taken at that time (*Josh* 15:63). Since they were all later part of the country, *Judges* must be the original account and *Joshua* was written later to rationalize the facts as the inhabitants found them.

Even Jewish scholars like Yigael Yadin and Abraham Malamat do not doubt that both books were written long after the supposed time of the events. Typically biblicist, Yadin and Malamat cannot bring themselves to say the scriptures are wrong, so they say they are right "in broad outline". Their theory is that the biblical stories will meet the archaeological evidence, if it is smeared out broadly enough. They smear it out as broadly as they can... then declare that the archaeological evidence upholds the scriptures! It really is remarkable the way the inspiration of this God makes otherwise normal human beings into cheats.

Jericho also was abandoned through much of the Late Bronze Age. A few burials suggest a small settlement from c 1400-1300 BC, most likely unwallled. The source of the Jericho story in *Joshua* is given as the *Book of Jashar* (*Josh* 10:12-13), one of the lost sources of the Jewish scriptures. The same book is mentioned in *2 Samuel* 1:18, introducing David's *Song of the Bow*. If the *Book of Jashar* contained stories about David, it could not have been written before the time of David. So the story it had of the fall of Jericho was a minimum of 200 years after the event. In fact these were written much later—some of their military perspectives reflecting the time of the Maccabees.

The 'official' view of Israel's history writers who lived hundreds of years after the settlement in Canaan thus became the 'biblical' view of a military conquest of Canaan.

Joseph A Calloway

## Archaeological Evidence of Conquest

*Joshua* describes the capture and destruction of key sites such as Jericho, Ai, Debir, Lachish and Hazor by the Israelites. Excavations at Lachish and at Tell Beit Mirsim (which Albright identified as biblical Debir) in the 1930s showed a destruction around 1250-1200 BC. Hazor, excavated by Yigael Yadin in the 1950s and re-excavated in an on-going work by Amon Ben Tor, has a massive destruction and subsequent burning at the end of the thirteenth century BC in agreement with the biblical description in *Joshua* 10. Ben Tor says only the Israelites could have destroyed Hazor because there is no sign of the Philistines, and Egyptian and Canaanite figurines were destroyed, counting them out. Since nothing positively identifies the Israelites either, why should they be preferred to the Philistines, who also might have destroyed Egyptian and Canaanite idols?

Multiple sites were destroyed, though over half a century or more. *Joshua's* was a slow blitzkrieg! At et-Tell, biblical Ai, French archaeologist, Judith Marquet-Krause from 1933 to 1936 found that Ai lay abandoned from about 2400 BC until about 1200 BC when it reappeared as a small village, so was not a city able to be attacked as it was in *Joshua*. Did the Israelites attack a pile of ruins? Dr Joseph A Callaway of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary trained under both G Ernest Wright and Kathleen Kenyon, the leading American and British archaeologists respectively. His first chance at his own excavation in 1964 was at Ai, offered the chance to follow up the excavations by Judith Marquet-Krause which had not been published properly when she died. Callaway said:

I must admit that I entertained notions of bridging the widening gulf between the biblical accounts in *Joshua* 7-8 and the actual evidence of the ruin itself.

He found with Marquet-Krause that Ai had been uninhabited at the dates proposed for *Joshua's* conquest—both the generally accepted date of 1250-1200 BC and the earlier date of 1400 BC:

The village appears from present evidence to have been unfortified, and occupation seems to have been interrupted by periodic abandonment, not violent destruction. Nothing in the present evidence warrants an identification of the village with the city of Ai captured by *Joshua* as described in *Joshua* 8:1-29.

For Ai, the most common explanation has been that the wrong site was excavated. As part of his excavation project, Callaway conducted a survey of all the archaeological sites in the vicinity, conducting soundings at several likely ones, but found no other possible site for Ai.

Oddly, Late Bronze Age (LBA) pottery found by Garstang at Ai and left in the care of the Albright institute went missing and has never been found. The “scholars” describe it as “lost”. Other pottery found by Garstang at Ai but not “lost” has been found not to be LBA.

Bethel and Ai are only a few miles apart, just north of Jerusalem. In the conquest, they were associated, even though Ai did not exist. Curiously, they were still associated together 800 years later in the “returns” of Nehemiah and Ezra, even though Ai again did not exist because it had been finally abandoned about 1050 BC. Why should Nehemiah and Ezra even mention men from a ruin? It seems most likely that Ai was a Baal associated with the shrine of Bethel, perhaps as a son of El, just as Yehouah was. If Ai was a Canaanite god, the account in *Joshua* might be an allegorical account of its suppression.

Also uninhabited at this time were Gibeon, Heshbon, Jarmuth, Hormah and Arad. Only Hazor existed at the time when Joshua was supposed to have destroyed it, and it was indeed destroyed at this time (1250 BC), but Philistines were likely to have been the cause. Moreover, if Hazor was destroyed in 1250 BC, how could Deborah and Barak be destroying it again in the time of the Judges? They could not have, but the victory described there seems so important that it is described twice, in prose and in verse. Since the Israelites were unable to conquer the belt of Canaanite cities stretching across the country, effectively protecting the even bigger and more strongly fortified city of Hazor, they cannot be seen as getting to this mighty fortress let alone, managing to seige it into submission when lesser cities had resisted.

When, as here, archaeology does indicate that a city was destroyed about the right time for a thirteenth century invasion, there is no indication of the reason for the destruction, and there are more likely reasons than conquest. Even when conquest is an option, the conquerors have rarely left obvious signs of who they were, and there were more obvious choices than the Israelites. The Egyptian nineteenth dynasty was failing and ultimately left the region ungoverned so that the Egyptian colonial principalities began to fight among themselves. A destroyed city is often multiply destroyed in a short time, suiting the idea of local wars rather than Israelite invaders. There might have been limited Egyptian punitive expeditions against some of the rebels, especially in the Shephelah. Lachish was destroyed but Egyptians or Philistines are more likely to have been responsible. The favoured site of Debir shows no sign of attack in the thirteenth century, and the alternative site, though destroyed was most likely destroyed by the newly arrived sea people than the Israelites.

Bethel was burnt to a cinder at the correct historical time, but the bible does not claim this city was incinerated. It was captured by the “tribe of Joseph”. Nor is burning necessarily a sign of conquest. Serious fires can be accidental and they can be started deliberately to destroy infestations and disease. The Great Fire of London could be an example of either of these.

The Iron Age settlements that succeeded the Bronze Age ones were culturally poorer than their predecessors. Amon Ben Tor’s excavations at Hazor show the unquestionably Canaanite city that existed before the Israelites could have arrived in the Palestinian hills as a sophisticated and elaborate city of wealth and grandeur. It was by far the finest and strongest city in the land, 200 acres in area and walled. The later city is much inferior, and this is the one that corresponds with the time when the Israelites are supposed to have arrived. The difference in quality of the city in the different times is much more compatible with a decline than with a conquest, though ending with a *coup de grace*.

For biblicists, the decline is proof that the invaders were ignorant and uncultured slaves from Egypt—the Israelites—that had wandered the deserts of the Sinai for a generation greatly improving their ignorance. Yet the transition to the Iron Age seems to have been generally accompanied by a cultural decline. The cause seems to have been climatic—drought. An incoming alien population would leave archaeological evidence in the shape of changed pots and other artifacts. The technological changes that have been noted seem associated with the drought, and attempts by people to live in arid and unfavourable conditions. Then the drought slowly began to ease.

## **More Archaeological Evidence**

Regarding the so-called settlement period, from about 1980, Adam Zertal conducted a fieldwalking survey of

the hills of Samaria which shows a jump in settlements from 39 in 1200—mostly based on springs or streams—to 220 in about 1000 BC. As they were in the hills, these sites were more difficult to farm than those in the valleys. Zertal concludes it is evidence of a new people coming in from outside and being obliged to farm the only land available, that on the arid hillsides. Zertal is reported as having said:

Archaeology without the bible is archaeology without a soul.

Adam Zertal

It puts him firmly in the camp of biblicists, archaeologists who cannot be objective because they already believe the bible before they look at the ground. Biblicists typically find small sites close to each other and date them as being at the Bronze Age transition with the Iron Age. According to the bible, that is when the Israelites entered the Promised Land. So, these excavated sites are called Israelite! They will find other sites then, and announce that they have found sites that show there were waves of invaders. Why they could not be people from the local valleys or city states, forced by population pressure, political disagreements or simply an ameliorating climate, to settle marginal land is not clear. Had the sites been found with no mythology to label them, few archaeologists would disagree that they would have all been described as Canaanite.

Even the bible admits there were large tracts of land to the east of the Jordan that some of the tribes were unwilling to leave on the offchance of finding something better to the west of the river. Moses had to get them to agree to help in the conquest, or peaceful settlement of the west according to which bit of the bible you believe, even though they were happy where they were, with no need to conquer or settle anywhere else. Having found the land to the west of the river to be largely marginal, it is a wonder they did not return to the east. The more likely interpretation is that the settlers were in the west already, but in the valleys.

Zertal admits that the settlers in the west, wherever they came from would have depended for water, if nothing else, on the Canaanites in the valleys or living near springs. They would have stored it in jars such as the collared rim jars often used falsely to characterize the Israelites. Few plastered cisterns had been cut at that stage, probably because only iron tools made them practicable, and as yet were not common.

Israel Finkelstein argued that populations in marginal areas are cyclic. Economic collapse is never far off, and when it happens, the population drops quite suddenly. Finkelstein points to similar cycles in the third and second millennia, before the one at the start of the Iron Age. Marginal land was settled, the population rose and a social administrative class with it. The system proves unsustainable, a collapse occurs and the population meets the crisis by dispersing. Thereafter the land can only support seasonal nomads moving their flocks about with the rains. Then the climate or the fertility of the land recovers enough to encourage incomers to try planting vines and olives, and the cycle begins again.

In 1000 BC, Israel was quite populated, but Judah was relatively sparsely populated. The northern country was better farmland, more fertile and less arid. Judah remained marginal, abutting the desert as it did. The surveys of A Zertal and I Finkelstein revealed some 70 settlements in the north in the LBA, but only eight in Judah at the same time. In the western foothills of the Shephelah, settlement actually declined about 1000 BC, the reasons being unknown, but might be to do with the decline of Egypt.

Zertal says the eastern Samarian slopes were settled first because the incomers were arriving from the east,

by crossing the Jordan. It ignores other possibilities—the eastern slopes being less marginal and therefore easier to farm. Culturally, the settlers between 1200 and 1000 seemed to have been Canaanites rather than a new people with different habits and methods. The Jewish feasts of Tabernacles, Unleavened Bread and Weeks, or Succoth, Passover and Shavuoth, were annual agricultural festivals of the Canaanites. Biblical sacrificial words are identifiable with Canaanite ones. The Canaanite High God was El, and the Jews identified him with Yehouah, El becoming the word translated as “God”.

Whatever faint archaeological signs the biblicists hopefully think they have found of cultural differences between the settler and the valley populations seem more likely to have been caused by poverty or adaptation to the poorer conditions. The data overall do not support the hypothesis of migration, so what is the point of trying to establish it from dubious interpretations of the settlement patterns. Even at the best of times, life in these sparse hills was never anything other than marginal. The range of pots in use is limited and luxuries are absent. These facts are true of each of the three millennial cycles. The people in the hills always struggled to exist.

Zertal found a pile of stones to the northeast of Mount Ebal that he began excavating, and decided, in 1985, was the altar built by Joshua (*Josh* 8:30ff) at the instigation of Moses (*Deut* 27:2ff). The archaeologist thought it had been deliberately covered up within a century of it being founded. Fills of the ash of sacrificial animals, jugs, bowls, jewellery, and even the odd scarab of Thutmose and Rameses II, and a seal were found. The dating evidence seems to center on 1200 BC.

The site is above the cultic city of Shechem and remote from it, and the pottery is distinct from that found in the city, poorer and simpler. Even so, the cultic practices seemed not to differ much from those deduced at Shechem. The practice of putting pottery vessels around a ritual structure, and the sacrifice of goats, sheep and cattle, but not pigs, were common to both sites. The scarabs too seem to have been Canaanite copies of popular Egyptian originals. Thus the Thutmose scarab was not from the reign of that king but one that remained popular for long afterwards, presumably as a charm. Shechem can be seen in the valley from Ebal, but not from this cult center, if that is what it was, because it is too far to the north. Nor can Mount Gerizim be seen from the site. It therefore is not convincingly situated to be the site described in the Jewish scriptures, although it was made of unhewn stone all right.

Skeletal remains in Palestine are not common, but there is no evidence from what there is of the arrival of any new people. The types found in the north (Megiddo), typical of the Canaanite population, are brachycephalic (broad headed) whereas in the south (Lachish), they are more of an Egyptian type right back into the Bronze Age.

Israel Finkelstein, a thorough archaeologist but unable to discard biblical influence, nevertheless sees *Joshua* as depicting settlement at the end of monarchy rather than in 1200 BC, but he thinks *1 Samuel* is a historical work and no one would dispute it! He finds a sacred site at Shiloh with a supposed terraced sanctuary that William Dever, often an apologist, finds is “wishful thinking”. Finkelstein is not seeing what is in the ground but the sanctuary described in *1 Samuel*. Regarding the territory of Benjamin, Finkelstein says:

The Hivites settled in the west and the Israelites in the east... we are unable to single out differences in material culture between the two ethnic identities living in the territory of Benjamin at the beginning of Iron I.

So, there is nothing in the archaeological data to show two cultures in the Judaeen hills, and Finkelstein shows unusual care in his analysis, yet he still says they are there.

Galilee is not part of Israel or Judah so are the people there Israelites? Galilaean villages are not characterized by collared rim pottery, once used as a marker of the Israelites. Finkelstein calls them Israelites anyway, for the sake of argument, so to speak, because he admits the term was not justified until the time of the monarchy. Before then they should just be called the people of the hill country of Palestine—but these people were Canaanites.

Z Gal surveyed sites in Galilee in the Iron Age and found none. Since the tribe of Issachar, according to the biblical tale, should have been settling there, he was bemused. The Israelites, he concluded, could not have settled the valleys because they must have settled the hills first. But the valleys were settled! Who were they? Their culture was continuous with the Bronze Age, so these were established towns, not new settlements. They were the native people of Palestine, the Canaanites.

The embarrassment was that these people used collared rim pottery! Thus Gal takes the absence of collared rim ware at Affuleh as sure proof that the site was Canaanite. If the tribe of Issachar were not settling here, where were they? The bible cannot be utterly wrong so Gal deduces that it was a bit wrong—they must have settled with the tribe of Manasseh in Samaria. The region was then called Issachar because the tribe of Issachar should have been there—but they were not in reality. Tortuous or not?

The archaeological facts are that there were no settlements in the hills of Galilee and the villages in the valleys had been there since the Bronze Age. They must have been native Canaanites. Some of these people liked collared rim pottery and others did not, but there is no evidence in the ground of invasion or re-settlement by strangers.

At Giloh, an ancient village, now virtually a suburb of Jerusalem and Palestinian, A Mazar detected “the only site in the northern part of Judah that can be related with much certainty to the earliest Israelite settlers”. Among the ways of identifying the village as Israelite is the prevalence of four roomed houses, a plan “common in Israelite sites in Iron Age I”. Yet elsewhere Mazar accepts that this type of house is “widely distributed in all parts of Palestine”, including “non-Israelite parts of the country”. It is hard to believe that Mazar is really so confused, so his peculiar logic must be meant for biblicists who merely want affirmation despite the logic.

Pottery is, once more, continuous into the Bronze Age, and collared rim ware is found on sites acknowledged *not* to be Israelite, added to which no collared rim ware is found where the Israelites had migrated from in the Negev. Yet Mazar still confidently concludes that Giloh was an Israelite village. Elsewhere he gets even more confident, telling us the four roomed house is typical of the “period of the Judges” and the identification of the people as Israelites is “natural”. Four roomed houses were found in the Transjordan. Collared rim jars were found before the Israelites were supposed to have arrived in the Hill Country in the thirteenth century. They are also found in places that were never Israelite. Biblicists like Mazar are desperate, but look ridiculous.

Describing another Iron Age site in the Palestinian hill country, Mazar declares a twelfth century Canaanite



figurine in bronze as Israelite, explaining it as because the Israelites had copied the manufacturing skills of the Canaanites, or had bought the figurine from them. In the second case the figurine remains Canaanite in manufacture, and the first is so unlikely given that experienced Canaanite metal workers were around, it can be rejected. Mazar makes no bones about the ultimate basis of his identifications:

Defining a distinctly material culture is a difficult venture. Our departure point should be sites which according to biblical traditions are Israelite during the period of Judges, such as Shiloh, Mizpah, Dan and Beersheba. Settlements with similar material culture in the same region can be defined as Israelite.

The absence of pig remains is often considered a characteristic of the Israelites, but the animal sacrifices at Megiddo analysed by Paula Wapnish match the general culture of sacrificial practice. Wapnish and B Hesse of Alabama University studied the distribution of the remains of pigs in the ancient near east. Pigs were not eaten or sacrificed in whole swaths of the ancient near East, and not just in the lands associated with the Israelites. The practices of the Israelites at Megiddo were no different. The consumption of pork actually declined from prehistoric times up until the Iron Age. A reason seems to be practical rather than cultish—the need of pigs for water, making them unsuitable for nomads in marginal areas. They needed a settled farming environment with adequate water supplies, but when the conditions applied, pigs seemed to have been the food of poor labourers in urban areas of Mesopotamia, not the well off, whether urban or rural.

Hesse and Wapnish found that pig remains were found in some of the Philistine cities, mainly those established in the first century or so of their arrival, but thereafter the Philistines acculturated to the habits of their neighbours, and acquired the aversion to pig. By the time that Nebuchadrezzar attacked Askalon, in 604 BC, the Philistines no longer ate pig. The Greeks had no such aversion to pork, and devout Jews in Hellenistic times took the consumption of pork to be a key distinction between Jew and Greek, and would not eat it even under threat or torture. Such taboos were written into the bible as ways of keeping the cult separate from the world.

### **The Apologetics of Joel F Drinkard, Jr**

Despite all the evidence of continuity of culture, Joel F Drinkard, Jr and his “scholarly” breed cannot let go of a conquest, even if it is watered down to nothing. It is the homeopathic, or should that be “homeopathetic”, view of biblical history. Water biblical history down enough and it will survive! Nevertheless he has to try to find something more substantial.

Literary studies have indicated that the final compilation of the Deuteronomistic History can be no earlier than the mid-sixth century BC, the latest date mentioned in *2 Kings*. People like Drinkard speak of circumstances that pertained in what they call “the period of Judges” as being evidence that the stories were genuinely old. For example, *Judges* mentions Philistines being in the land alongside the Canaanites and Hebrews, and Drinkard adds:

No scholars have doubts about that—in terms of its facticity for the period of the Judges.

But no scholars have any doubt that Philistines were still called Philistines and lived in the same place in the mid-sixth century. Who is Drinkard hoping to fool? Not the scholars presumably, so it must be the ordinary gullible religious punters!

Archaeology has shown that this very time, when the Israelites were supposed to be conquering was the same time as the Philistines were first entering the land from the north. Yet nothing in the bible suggests they were new to the area. The opposite is implied because right from the time of the exodus itself, the all powerful Israelite God makes sure they take a risky detour through the desert to avoid Philistines who are evidently already settled on the coastal plain. Albright thinks this is about 1290 BC. What is certain is that there were no Philistines around in time for the earlier date of the exodus that some Jews and Christians still prefer, proving again that evidence is immaterial to their beliefs. Drinkard goes on in similar vein but adding nothing to his basic trickery.

Jericho and Ai especially present problems for interpretation. But the same is true of many other ancient historians... Every history has its own bias or perspective or presuppositions.

Indeed it does, but good history tries to allow for it, whereas biblical "history" is blatantly and unashamedly biased. These religious scholars have no intention of bowing to God's will when it is the revelation of a historical or archaeological truth, to correct the errors of ancient historians. They already know what is true! Drinkard says that:

The biblical tradition of a systematic, all-encompassing military conquest is, no doubt, much overdrawn, and there are some contradictory elements even in the conquest tradition as we have it in the Bible. But I do not believe that Israel moved into the land without any conflict.

Archaeological surveys have shown a dramatic increase in small villages settled in the highlands of the hill country suggesting, says Drinkard, an influx of new population. He thinks "we are certainly justified in seeing the Hebrews among this new population". Again, he simply ignores the archaeology that shows there was no outside influx because nothing in the culture suggests any new practices such as a new people might have brought in. Drinkard observes upon the characteristic pottery of the Philistines which identifies them, but the supposed characteristic Israelite pottery proves to have been used by Canaanite people too, implying that the Israelites were Canaanites on this criterion.

Drinkard thinks that some evidence of Egyptian influence in the bible proves "the Hebrews surely did come out of an Egyptian setting". He sees the Egyptian root Moses, "born of", present in some Pharaonic names like Thutmose and Rameses—born of Thoth, and born of Ra. Moses was obviously "born of" nothing at all. Other Egyptian names appear in Levitical and Aaronite genealogies. Phinehas is Pi-nehase, meaning the Nubian. Yet, Canaan was an Egyptian colony for centuries. That is sufficient an answer, but in addition, the Egyptian kings called Ptolemies supported the temple for almost 100 of its formative years, and translated the scriptures into Greek in the third century BC. Many Egyptian links could have been added at this time to flatter the Egyptian sponsors of the temple. Incidentally, if Phinehas was a Nubian, how could he have been an Israelite?

Drinkard thinks that because the bible mentions two Egyptian cities, Pi-Ramese, or Pr-Ramese, "House of Rameses" and Pi-'Atum, or Pr-'Atum, "House of Atum" the exodus is proved. Rameses II was the last of the great Pharaohs, lived a very long life, and left a strong memory behind him. It is not surprising that these towns should be remembered, and used as period detail. They are not proof of the exodus, certainly not one that Drinkard claims happened in the reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep, 200 years before Rameses started to build his cities.

Hazor, Lachish, Debir, Tell Beit Mirsim, and Bethel (Beitin) were all destroyed during this time—allowing a half century or more for the destructions, from about 1230 BC to about 1175 BC. Drinkard argues, “Egypt was trying to reassert some influence over Canaan at this time, and certainly the Philistines were present. But why should we discount the one record which attributes the destruction to a particular group, the Hebrews?” The answer is that the bible is late—a thousand years after these events, so is likely to have mythologized or romanticized, especially as there is no other basis for believing what it says—but we know for certain there were warlike Egyptians, Philistines, Hittites as well as local warlords, any of whom could have caused destruction, and were more likely to have. Rameses II fought the Hittites at Qadesh in 1274 BC. Nearby cities could have been destroyed in the campaigning. Drinkard determines to prove he is no scholar: “I would argue that we should attribute to the Hebrews the destructions specified by the *Old Testament* if there is no conflicting evidence”. It simply is not scholarly!

The Merneptah (1212-1202 BC) funerary stele reports the people of Israel as being in the land of Canaan c 1200 BC. If the exodus was around 1290 BC and a conquest occurred around 1250-1200 BC then, to get here, the Israelites defied the strongest of all recent Pharaohs, and one who had large armies in the area to fight a much stronger enemy, the Hittites. Drinkard wants the stele to imply that Israel was a significant nation, but several other places mentioned were not. Merneptah, a weaker pharaoh than Rameses, describes on the stele how he made mincemeat of an attack of the Philistines, described as the Sea People, on the Delta, killing 6000 of them. He also staged a campaign into Canaan in the third year of his reign, and says he destroyed all the males of a people called “Israel” who lived in the land of Hurru at this time. If this is to be linked to the bible somehow, why not as the occasion when the pharaoh’s armies were swamped by the Israelite God. Both sides portrayed the battle as a victory, and the Israelites mythologized theirs. All that can be said confidently is that Israel were recognized by the Egyptians whom they say they defeated as a Canaanite people.

Desolation is for Tehennu; Hatti is pacified;  
Plundered is the Canaan with every evil;  
Carried off is Ashkelon; seized upon is Gezer;  
Yanoam is made as that which does not exist;  
Israel is laid waste, his seed is not;  
Hurru is become a widow for Egypt!  
All lands together, they are pacified;  
Everyone who was restless, he has been bound  
by the king of Upper and Lower Egypt...

Joel F Drinkard Jr tries to hedge his bets in every direction by claiming that the Israelites had multiple origins in the thirteenth century, but “probably” some did come out of an Egyptian setting as Exodus-Joshua states. Others were Canaanites who allied themselves with the Hebrews as indicated in *Joshua* 2, 9. Some settled peaceably in areas previously unoccupied—thus the great increase in small villages in Iron I through much of the land. Some fought “at times” with the Canaanites. Destructions at Hazor, Bethel and Lachish “may” have been at the hand of the Hebrews. By the time of the Merneptah stele “an entity known as Israel” was in the land. None of it sounds convincing and the list of biblical miracles does not add to our conviction.

Mazar makes the truth plain. Nothing in the archaeology of these sites shows any sign of the arrival of a new

people. Quite the opposite—repeatedly the signs are of continuity. Only by an appeal to the bible can any site be declared as Israelite. Israelite has no archaeological meaning. Finkelstein cannot see how an Israelite at Giloh would distinguish himself from a Canaanite, but cautiously concludes they did, an attempt to disarm the critic by seeming to make a difficult but measured judgement. In fact, if there were any Israelites in the twelfth century, and they were indistinguishable from Canaanites, they *were* Canaanites. The BBC *Bible Mysteries* documentary (*Joshua and the Battle of Jericho*, Sunday 15 February, 2004, BBC 2) seems conclusive—DNA tests show Canaanites and Israelites “were not just similar in their cultures, they were genetically identical”.

## Joshua

The traditional editors seen in the *Pentateuch* and coded as JEDP are not so clearly seen in *Joshua*. The elements of D seem strongest and are considered earlier, and P can be distinguished as the last of the main editors, but J and E, thought to have been the earliest layers of tradition in *Genesis* are less certain.

Few disagree that in the first twelve chapters of *Joshua* that give the traditional conquest by a military leader, there seems to be two strands of tradition, but W Rudolf sees the main hand as J whereas R E Wolff saw no J. Noth can see a southern tradition and one from further north.

The chapters from 13 to 19 are scarcely dramatic unlike the first 12, being allocations of named districts, written by the Priestly editor, the priests being the great hierarchists, organizers and listers, and imply the separation of the Samaritans as a schismatic sect. The same author or one with the same pedantic outlook wrote *Judges* 1. R H Pfeiffer recognizes these chapters as good descriptions of Palestine under the Persians in the fifth century, and the topographical work of Alt, Elliger, Noth and even Albright confirm Pfeiffer's conclusion.

The address by Joshua in chapter 23 is by D and is probably the core of the book about which the rest has been written, and chapter 24 until the end few verses seems sure to be. The summarized history of *Joshua* 24 is an expanded version of *Deuteronomy* 26:5-9 but also written by the Deuteronomic school about the same time as the original.

Many of the people in the early scriptural books are symbolic of different groups of “returners” of different origins allegiances and purposes. It seems they vied with each other about how the edicts of the Persian kings should be understood, and their disagreements sometimes held up implementation. Kinship descriptions and genealogies should be read as how these groups interrelated in practice, not by blood. Marriages were mergers or alliances (*Gen* 38; *Num* 26:19-22), father and sonship are power relationships and brotherhood denotes equality of status (*Josh* 17:1; *Num* 26:29).

Joshua was originally called Saviour (Hosea) 700 years before Cyrus the Persian declared himself to be the Saviour of the Jews and made names like this popular. Later, Hosea was called Joshua, meaning “Yehouah is Saviour”, illustrating that at some stage the god, Yehouah, began to take any credit going. None of the events of *Joshua* really happened 700 years before Cyrus, but not long after Cyrus passed on his mantle of saviour to other Persian kings, when the Jewish scriptures were originally composed.

In fact, the campaign of Joshua is simply the work of a salvation army not an army. Joshua of the conquest is

most likely an allegorical depiction of the priest, Joshua, who “returned” with Zerubabel. His conquest of Canaan was the initial work done by the returners to convert the Canaanites from their Baals to the Persian God of Heaven. The victorious battles in Joshua are allegorical victories—the winning over of groups of Canaanites to the imported new religion. Districts or cities that fell or were conquered had really yielded to the new god. Among them we read barely disguised accounts of conversions (*Josh* 2:1-14;6:22-25;9;24; *Judges* 1:22-26}. The whole was dressed up to seem like the actual military campaigns of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, accessible to Persian administrators through the archives of the conquered empires of Mesopotamia.

The spies, sent to look over the land, lodge with a harlot in Jericho called Rahab. She was probably not a prostitute because harlot was the standard insult used for the believers in gods other than Yehouah. It will have meant merely that she was a worshipper of a Baal. This Baal might have been the god Rehab or Rechab, the god whose name is perpetuated in the name of a king of Yaudi, Barrekab, Son of Rekab. Rehab means *breadth* or implies *width*. He is a Canaanite Sea God, represented as a sea monster, also called Leviathan. The sect of Rechabites will originally have been the worshippers of this sea god, but they seem to have converted easily and early and become or joined the priesthood of Jerusalem, who were then called Levites. In the myth of their origins they are depicted as being the original Nazirites, those especially consecrated to God and bound to refuse the fruit of the grape and not to cut their hair.

Both “Rechab” and “Leviathan” were names also used by the Jews to mean Egypt, presumably because Egypt was seen as a monster. The woman might therefore have been called Rahab for religious or for ethnic reasons. The reason why the Persians undertook to restore Jerusalem as a walled city seems to have been because of Egyptian intransigence and perpetual rebellion. Egyptians were therefore particularly disliked, and this will have been the origin of the idea of an exodus from Egyptian oppression.

Joshua, the son of Nun, is the son of the “Redemption of Posterity”. What was Joshua redeeming if he was truly a warlord of the twelfth century? Redeeming is “buying back”. The “returning exiles” were presented as redeeming their old country but the Israelites were being given a new country by God in the Moses and Joshua sagas. Thus the patronym of Joshua is a better title for a fifth century Joshua supposedly “returning” than a twelfth century Joshua “conquering”.

Joshua is shown in *Joshua* 24 as gathering all the heads of the still separate tribes together at Shechem, the shrine of the House of Joseph, and persuading them to follow one god, Yehouah, the god of Israel. K Mohlenbrink thinks Shechem was substituted for Shiloh from an early date. In *Judges*, Shiloh seems more important and Shechem is depicted as destroyed. Joshua was inviting the different people to join a tribal league (amphictyony) under the protection of this one god. Moses therefore had not already done it as *Exodus* pretends, and we might have here a fossil of the truth. Joseph, the “returning” priest drew the elders together and imposed the god Yehouah instead of the god El. The leaders of the tribes were called princes (nesiim).

The centre of the cult was the *Ark of the Covenant*, a mobile shrine, because it had to be taken to each of the tribal shrines for worship. Before long the myth of Moses and the Exodus justified the peripatetic temple, and gave historical credence to the adoption of Yehouah as the national god. When the temple was built and dedicated a few decades later, the Levites were given the status of the local Magi. When Alexander defeated the Persians, the tribes, which had never really existed except as Persian tithing districts, had no further purpose and disappeared. Only the Levites were preserved as temple functionaries.

The early part at least of Joshua was added or re-written when the Yehouah faction succeeded over the El faction, and Judah became the accepted name of the country. The tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Levi begin as senior groups in the coalition but later disappear, Levi becoming the official priesthood. The others must have been groups of “returners” who made no impression.

## **Consolidation of Political Power**

It is idiotic of clergymen to pretend *Joshua* pertains to some period around 1200 BC when all the evidence denies this, and few scholars will not place it hundreds of years later. Most take it to be part of the “Deuteronomic History” which relates to the hypothesis that the missing manuscript found in the reign of Josiah was *Deuteronomy*, and, in *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence*, Lori L Rowlett takes *Joshua* also to be written in the Assyrian period. Whoever wrote the part of the history referring to Josiah meant the document to be *Deuteronomy*, but the story is a myth to persuade the people that the new law of Ezra was simply an old law that had not been properly applied. Rowlett observes that nearly all scholars admit that post-exilic editions have been made, displaying a reluctance on their part to recognize that the work itself is purely post-exilic.

Rowlett says that the authors of Joshua used “the rhetoric of warfare and nationalism as an encouragement and a threat” to intimidate the people into submission to the government. The concern in *Joshua* for national unity implies a lack of it. An aim of the text was to encourage it. Despite her mistakenly dating *Joshua* two centuries early, Rowlett correctly sees its purpose as the “consolidation of political power”, as seeking to assert a socio-political order amidst chaos. In fact, the chaos was the colonization of the hill country and the imposition of a new god by the Persians, hated and opposed by the native Canaanites. “The threat inherent in the Joshua text functions as an instrument of coercion, or at least, encouragement to submission” to a central government whose authority was not secure. The aim is to suggest a sense of identity, based on a common opposition to surrounding enemies, that would unite the factions. The Canaanites are the outsiders but they are also, of course, among the subjects of the propaganda. The aim was to persuade them to accept the new religion and principles. The Canaanites who were thus persuaded and joined with the colonists in the new belief were set up in opposition to the Canaanites who preferred their original religion. Those who refused to accept the changes being made were deemed the enemy, the outsiders.

At the same time, those who submitted and became loyal were depicted as united and purposeful under the leadership of Joshua (“Yehouah Saves”) acting as the earthly agent of the god. This was the common concept of the time, and still is, to all intents and purposes, today. The US will not invade another country without at least making a pretence of calling upon God’s help. In those days, it was more immediate, but there is no basis for Rowlett to claim that the relationship of Joshua and Yehouah is evidence of the Assyrian period, and no other. It was true also of the Persian period when the Shahanshahs were certain they had been chosen to rule on earth by God.

## **Josiah**

Josiah is another version of Joshua as many prominent scholars, like F M Cross and R D Nelson, have noted. Both are the Persian “Salvation of God” retrojected into the past, one to explain historically the divine right to the land and the other to justify historically the divinely given law. In the first, Joshua succeeds Moses (Mazda) and the vassal treaty formulation in which a subjected people pledge allegiance to the suzerain is invoked, as



it was in *Deuteronomy*, the law. In *Joshua* 8:30-35, Joshua is depicted as the king, but the real king of the temple state was God, so Joshua is simply a title of God, and the story is an allegory of God's salvific action. In *2 Kings* 23:1-3, the same covenant mediation occurs, but Joshua is Josiah, and in *2 Kings* 11:17, a similar event is led by the priest, Jehoiada, on behalf of the underage Joash, another Joshua. Jehoiada means exactly the same as Ahuramazda—Wise Lord!

In *Joshua* 8:34, a reading is made from a divine book! Runaway slaves with a book in 1200 BC! The book meant Ezra's law—the law of the Medes and the Persians. The divine book was the legal agreement being imposed by the Persians on Yehud—*Deuteronomy*! It was a covenant, literally a contract with the Persian king who stood for God. Josiah is depicted as a political Joshua. He is shown mainly as uniting the people politically and religiously, not militarily, under "one god, one cult, one law, one ruling house and one subject people". There was no basis for this in Assyrian times. Though the Assyrians had their national god, Assur, they made no pretence, as the Zoroastrians did, of monotheism. If the mythology of the bible is accepted, Josiah instituted Persian policies 200 years before the Persians. The biblical Josiah is an invention of the Deuteronomistic Historian.

The Deuteronomistic History school of writers aimed to show that God controlled history, so that the disobedience and apostasy of the people would be rightly punished by God pulling the appropriate historical strings. The history was meant to show that He had done it many times before in the past and would do it again, if the people refused to conform to the law written down in the covenant.

God was recognizably at work in this history, continuously meeting moral decline with warnings and punishments, and, finally, when they proved fruitless, with total annihilation.

Martin Noth

Christian evangelists today seem to think this is their own tolerant and loving God. Of course, there had been no total annihilation, but since the colonists "returned" from elsewhere in the Persian empire had no previous history, being an utterly disparate group dependent on the Persians for everything including their previous history, the authors could maintain the myth of total annihilation, of which the "returners"—the colonists—were the uncomprehending "remnant". They will have realized—or some will have—that they were not a remnant at all, but accepted that they had been put in charge of Yehud as its ruling elite under Persian protection, so it was in their interest to maintain the pretence. They had every reason to promote the myth provided for them, that they were the righteous remnant spared by God, while the incorrigible natives were mainly wicked and perpetually disobeyed God.

## **Deuteronomic Law**

Noth had no understanding of the meaning of the covenant, which he took to have its conventional biblical meaning—the rules handed down by God to govern the relations between Him and His people. Once the covenant is seen as a vassalage treaty, the only question is, "Under which suzerain?" The treaty form was general in the Near East from the second millennium and was used by Hittites, Egyptians, Assyrians and Persians, but the Persians fit best in this instance.

The Deuteronomistic History retrojected the fifth century colonisation of Yehud into the remote past to show

that, even before the Jews had settled in Yehud, they had had a commitment to their god, Yehouah, and His law. In *Deuteronomy* 9:9-11, the covenant is identified as equal to the law, but the authors are concerned above all with the loyalty of the people to God, and the dangers of apostasy. Plainly their theory was that a commitment of the people to the new god was essential to their acceptance of the rest of the law, and emphasis on particular parts of the law was pointless to people who were not loyal to the god who was its ultimate author. A second concern, though, is the centralization of worship in Jerusalem (*Josh* 8:30ff; *Dt* 27:4-8). Since earlier colonists and the native people had worshipped at several shrines, it suggests the Deuteronomistic Historian was writing originally late in the fifth century, or in the fourth, after Jerusalem had been rebuilt as the capital of the temple state.

So, for the Deuteronomistic History, the law is the Deuteronomic law. It shows this was the law when the Deuteronomistic History was written, and all the sacerdotal aspects of it were post-Persian additions. So, “the law” in *Joshua* has few legal implications but mainly the moral requirement to be loyal to one god in one sanctuary. Moses as a “historical” figure who wrote down God’s laws had not yet been invented and existed only as a misunderstanding of the meaning of Ahuramazda.

*Joshua* 22:10-34 strongly condemns building sanctuaries that might divide the cult. When the Deuteronomistic Historian invents the mythical kings of ancient Israel, it is their responsibility to ensure observance of the law. The only king the Jews had at the time was the Persian king, so the mythical history established the king’s right to apply God’s law. Effectively he has “the monopoly on religious power” with the priesthood subordinate. And since the king was appointed by God as His regent, the king had God’s own approval to ruthlessly suppress opposition, competitors and insurrection. This was exactly how the Persians saw themselves as kings. They did not claim divinity, like Roman emperors, but had divine rights conferred on them by God. The very fact that they held the office of king proved it. It was God’s will and they had God’s sanction to do anything to uphold God’s will.

Yet the Deuteronomistic History makes no bones about the monarchy as a local phenomenon not being God’s prime wish, but only a concession to the desires of His people. The Deuteronomic History shows that the kings were fallible, often going astray and leading the people astray. Only a few were upstanding and even they were characterized with blemishes. Among them is Josiah, though Noth realizes that *Deuteronomy* was not really written then. He makes it a sixth century work—still a century or more early. Josiah is the Persian Salvation retrogressed by 200 years. Apostasy from its high standards led immediately to the Babylonian conquest. It was a direct warning that if they did not remain loyal to the actual Persian Salvation, they would suffer similarly.

The myth of the good king Josiah was to show how the law could be obeyed when it was approached seriously. It was a mythical historical precedent for Persian rule. Josiah was ideal with respect to religious exclusivity, the aspect of the law that best served the Persian consolidation of power. Otherwise the History showed that local monarchs mainly led to trouble, and essentially the history proposes that the people were better off being obedient to God and His Saviour king, the Persian Shahanshah, who would allow the people to be ruled directly by God providing they served the temple loyally. The purpose of the temple was to collect taxes.

Is a law given by God through a prophet, God’s law or the prophet’s law? The law God gave through Moses is called the law of Moses. The obvious explanation is that Moses was once considered as God. God’s law began by being called the law of Moses when Moses was the name of God. Later, when people thought God had

another name, and was no longer Moses, they decided that Moses was the prophet whom God had used to send his law. He was a prophet who was intimate with God, but he was not God. The new name for God was Yehouah. In the story of the Conquest written in Joshua, although Yehouah is prominent, Joshua is following the orders of Moses. Joshua is literally God's Saviour who follows the instructions of his God, Moses, just as the Shoshyant is the Persian Saviour who follows his God Ahuramazda. Yehouah ordering both Moses and Joshua looks like an additional layer of authority added later.

The Deuteronomistic Historian draws parallels between Joshua and Moses. Moses is how the word Mazda sounded to the uncomprehending audience of Ezra. So Moses is God (Ahuramazda) mortalized as His messenger on earth. Joshua is the same. He is God's Saviour (or Saoshyant in Persian religion) , and so also a mortal regent of God on earth. Since Moses and Joshua finish up with the same role as Yehouah's agent, they have marked parallels that do not pass the Deuteronomistic Historian by. Unsurprisingly, F M Cross and R D Nelson see Joshua as Josiah, and R E Friedmann sees Moses as Josiah. A multiplicity of scholars note many parallels between Jesus and both Moses and Joshua. All are the same mythical figure, the Persian Saoshyant, transformed into Judaism.

The scholar to bring the post-exilic authorship of the Deuteronomistic History to attention was J H van Seters. Van Seters was criticized for not explaining the pre-exilic themes in the Deuteronomic History. One wonders how anyone can know what a pre-exilic theme is except through the Deuteronomic History. These critics cannot seem to understand that what they know of pre-exilic Israel comes from the bible itself. The pre-exilic themes are what the Deuteronomistic History tells us they are, and they are Persian propaganda. Many, perhaps most, of these biblical scholars cannot step out of their preconceptions, and those who can cannot find academic employment. Though the whole of the history in the Jewish bible was written in and after the Persian period as propaganda, they can fool themselves that they can nevertheless discern a history besides this.

Manasseh is blamed for God's punishment of defeat and exile by Nebuchadrezzar, yet Josiah had appeared between Manasseh and the defeat, apparently righting Manasseh's wrongs. Scholars are puzzled by this and suggest that blaming Manasseh was added on, but it was probably the insertion of Josiah that upset the original plan. The Deuteronomic authors decided that the new law would be more acceptable if it were seen as an old law, newly discovered shortly before the Babylonian conquest. They therefore slotted in Josiah and his Deuteronomic reforms. Josiah's reign becomes the culmination of Israelite history, as is becoming for any Saoshyant, but the Saviour was the Persian king not Josiah.

A whole school of critics following F M Cross and R D Nelson, on the basis of style and references to the promise to David, consider the Deuteronomic history to have been edited twice, the original that of Josiah's time and then during the exile. The perception of two redactions can be understood, but it is hard to understand how they know when they were done, other than wishful thinking. If the Persians devised the first edition, it was most probably the Maccabees who made a major alteration in the second century BC to justify their new independent state of Judaea, and give it a glorious but spurious ancient history.

S McKenzie cannot understand why a book written to magnify Josiah should begin with *Deuteronomy*, *Joshua* and *Judges*. Why, indeed? But that the books were written by and after the time of Ezra under the Persians, who needed to impose a new law on an unwilling people, and persuade them to accept it, accounts for the whole arrangement. The conditions throughout the whole of the Deuteronomic history remain

the same—they are the conditions that the Persian colonists met when the temple state was being set up. The people were worshipping the Baals, the righteous were trying to reform them, the native people's religious rituals and traditions were being forcibly abandoned, local sanctuaries were being closed and their administrators and provincial priests were unemployed.

The opponents of Josiah's reforms were the traditional enemies of the Persians in the region, the Egyptians. The purpose of the history was to counter this opposition by showing that the law, the centralization of worship in Jerusalem, and loyalty to the god, Yehouah, had a long history behind it, and history expressed God's will. It is incredible that a well established and ancient law had been forgotten until it was rediscovered as *Deuteronomy*. Much more credible is that *Deuteronomy* was the law! What was the incentive and purpose of inventing such a law in the time of Josiah? There is none. The only credible hypothesis to explain the mysterious appearance of such a law was as a vassalage treaty by the Persians.

Sin in the Deuteronomic History is apostasy and disobedience to God. It has nothing to do with crime or disobedience to law in general. The promise to David is an empty promise aimed at getting enthusiastic support for the reforms. The reluctance of God to concede a monarch is the reluctance of the Persians. The promise is conditional on loyalty and the obedience of the people to God, and is plainly meant to impress upon people that the only way they will get political independence is through obedience. The Persians can have had no intention of ever allowing independence to Yehud, and the promise to David is purely propaganda. When the independent state was achieved by the Maccabees, they showed themselves as the realisation of the promise.

The sins of kings like Jeroboam and Manasseh were serious affairs because they were God's regents, allowed reluctantly by God in response to the popular demand, and their crimes of leading astray the people had to be viewed seriously. The aim was essentially to predispose the people against local monarchs. The fact that a king like Josiah was shown in a good light was meant to emphasize the overall pessimism about monarchy. No occasional good kings could make up for the generality of sinful ones, and so Josiah could not, in the end, save the people from God's anger. The way to avoid it was to reject native kings all together and accept God's will. The Jewish king could only be the king of kings—the Persian king!

The amusing thing about biblicists is that they accept everything in the biblical mythology and try to explain it from the evidence in the myth itself. Why should a minor king of a tiny kingdom about as big as Devon be concerned about centralisation. Why should such drastic measures suddenly be necessary, disrupting the kingdom, tiny as it is? Utterly divorced from history, the biblicists can pretend that Israel is large like the USA, or even like the UK. They can speak of "outlying areas" "far from Jerusalem", when almost nothing was more than a day or two's walk from the capital. They will not seek historical explanations but only rationalizations within the mythology itself.

The real point is to figure out when the new religion was imposed, why, by whom, and why and how it was written back into history. The Persian explanation, with subsequent development under Greeks and Maccabees, is a complete explanation, unlike the hodge-podge of explaining-away biblicists indulge in. Naturally much has been lost and not all the details can be known, but the explanation puts the bible properly into history. What biblicists hate is that it shows that most of the wonderful *Old Testament* sagas were propaganda.

## **A Mouse that Roared?**

People like R D Nelson can talk of “the literary and intellectual life” of Judah in about 620 BC. It is hard to see that such a tiny and poor country had any literary and intellectual life, but if it had any, it must have been too small to matter. He talks about Judah expanding under Josiah to fill the vacuum left by the decay of Assyrian power. This is purely fantasy—an acceptance of the myth of David and Solomon, doubly fantastic in that it could happen again, let alone at all. The minute country of Judah could not have replaced Assyria in a million years. Assyria was replaced by its powerful southern neighbour, Babylonia, then by the Medes and the Persians—mighty nations with populations of millions of people. Judah cannot have had even a significant fraction of 100,000. No one who gives it a minute’s thought can hold such views, but doubtless Nelson, like most of his breed, think such falsehoods are holy indemnities, or perhaps they are happy to milk their earthly sinecures.

So, we are invited to imagine Assyria retreating before the might of Judah, that Josiah presided over a growth of nationalism, reunification, centralisation and dynastic pride, all of it deduced from within the myth itself. It is astonishing! And they call it scholarship. They would be no less useful expounding on God’s promise to Bilbo Baggins. Anyone can conjecture whatever they like within a fictitious situation, when the author is no longer alive to tell you what they meant, if anything, but these clever men must know it is utterly futile. Those who are not utterly cynical believe that it is God’s work—it is God’s work to invent lie upon lie to keep the sacred mythology in touch with history! Lori Rowlett, rather dryly for a biblical scholar, notes that there is no reason to believe that the Deuteronomic History version of the past was “either accurate or objective”. It almost restores your confidence in religious scholarship!

Robert and Mary Coote think Josiah was up against local bandits like the ones in *Judges*. These irregulars were supposed to have lived 500 years earlier than Josiah according to the biblical scheme of things, and one imagines should have little basis after half a millennium of the Israelite god and His law. “Apostasy!” they declare was what Josiah legislated against, but the story of continual apostasy over 500 years is itself incredible. *Deuteronomy* was not directed at apostasy but at the people who continued to worship their traditional and familiar Baals. The Cootes, nonetheless, are right but the reforms were 200 years later, and the period of *Judges* is really the period when the Canaanites resisted the imposition of Medean rule, and the imposition of the Persian God. The Cootes, and Cross and Nelson all take Joshua to be Josiah mythologized. Not bad! But both were mythologized Saviours, and Saviours were imposed by conquerors. Josiah was an internal Saviour in the myth, but was really an invention of the Persians. He stood for the Persians as Saviours, and did just what the Persians wanted to do—but 200 years early.

It is, or ought to be, plain enough that the Deuteronomic History was not initially for public consumption. Few could read, and those who could were priests. The history was to train and indoctrinate the priestly class of Yehud. Deuteronomy, the law, was read out in public as the bible says, and as we know from other vassalage treaties. The priests read it out, and the Deuteronomic History would have given them material to use in their exhortations to the people that accompanied the reading of the law. These were the origins of the sermons of the Christian churches, and soon the sentiments were being set to song for the Levitical cantors to chant, and spur the people themselves to sing in their daily lives.

## **Divine Intervention in History**

The Jewish and Christian idea that the Hebrew god was unique in revealing himself in history is yet another big

lie. T C Vriezen declares that “Israel did not derive its knowledge of God first and foremost from nature, as the ancient oriental people did, but from the acts of God in the history of the people”. If clergymen believe this they rarely show any curiosity about why it should be. For them, it is enough that God reveals Himself thus, but the historian would want to find a reason why the Israelites should differ from their neighbours. The plain answer is that they did not. The Israelites had gods exactly equal to their neighbours, fertility gods and seasonal gods like Baal, Mot and Anath.

The religion that the clergymen speak of was not the native Israelite religion but an ethical religion brought in by colonists from Persia. Not only that, but it is not true either that the older gods did not have historical intentions. B Albrektson, in a book with the long but descriptive title, *History and the Gods: an Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East and Israel*, refutes the belief that the Jewish god was unique in showing itself in the events of history as opposed to the cyclical return of the seasons. Albrektson has shown that the Jewish god was in a line of gods, a whole tradition of gods, that revealed themselves in history from the third millennium BC onwards. Sumerians, Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians and even the Moabites all had such gods. In view of the “exile” in Babylonia, it cannot be unimportant that Marduk was one of these gods. Albrektson says that a god who acted in history was “part of the common theology of the Ancient Near East”. He found the nature gods of the fertility religions were just as willing to intervene in history. There is absolutely no point in calling upon a god, if it is unwilling to intervene on your part in answer to your prayers. These gods were believed to intervene, and also to side with their worshippers in battles. It was so obviously commonplace that it is monstrous that Jews and Christians should say the opposite in the interests of their own exclusiveness. It is a transparent lie that no one even stops to consider.

As long ago as 1901, Friedrich Schwally, from a detailed examination of all near eastern ancient literature on warfare, observed that all cultures in the region asked for divine assistance in battles. Ashurbanipal, quoted by M Weippert, writes:

Not by my own strength, nor by the might of my bow,  
By the might of my gods, by the might of my Goddess,  
I subjected the lands...  
To the yoke of Assur.

The Canaanite legends of Ugarit speak of cosmic battles, and it is possible that the tradition remaining in the bible of Yehouah as a warrior leader is a relic of the Canaanite god, Yehouah. Besides the tradition of a warrior leader, Yehouah fights against chaos, a Canaanite tradition that would have facilitated the transition to the Persian ethical god. In the Ugaritic myths Baal also fights chaotic forces, paralleling *Psalms* 68, 74 and 89.

Texts similar to the Ugaritic ones are found from second century BC Mari, and they too suggest that divine assistance will overcome odds against. The supposed distinction is that the Israelites did not have to fight at all because God would defeat their enemies for them, but king Zimri-lim is told to stay at home while his god took full responsibility for the outcome of the battle. It seems this could only have been true in mythology, but it was true in biblical history because, half the time, God was on the side of the enemy to punish the sinful people. God is on your side when you win but on the enemy’s side when you lose. How does this differ from there being no god at all?



All battles in the ancient near east were dominated by gods but the result had to be rationalized with hindsight knowledge of the outcome. Notwithstanding, ancient myths of gods expected to fight chaos or their followers' enemies, the biblical traditions all have the impress of divine assistance having been deduced or assumed after a profane battle had yielded its outcome. War in the ancient near east was always a divine responsibility, and the outcome showed the mood of the god. Persian kings attributed their success to Ahuramazda.

Whereas the consensus of older scholarship was that the scriptures were unique, as they had to be to be uniquely revealed, more and more modern scholars are accepting, what should have been obvious to an uncluttered mind, that the scriptures have much in common with ancient near east texts. The more objective modern scholars have laid to rest the clerical lie that the scriptures are unique in their representation of the finger of God in history.

## **Monarchy**

The Persians were intent on setting up a theocracy but there had been a period of monarchy in Israel and the administrator-priests had to explain it within their theocratic historical framework. If God's people wanted a king then they should have a king to teach them a lesson. Saul's history was written as a warning that a theocracy should not want kings. The institution of the monarchy in *1 Samuel* chapters 7-13 was shown as a blasphemy against God leading to innumerable punishments, the overthrow of the monarchy and "exile" (if there ever was one). Only the saviour of the Jews, Cyrus, allowed righteous Jews to "return" to their homeland!

P Weimar has shown that the holy war in the Jewish scriptures was directed at the royal court in Jerusalem, and its ideology. The holy war tradition reflected the dichotomy between prophecy and kings, and was a criticism of monarchy. It was therefore part of the propaganda against those who resisted Persian rule, in favour of home rule.

Plainly there were two sides to the battle, and both seem to have been partly represented *mutatis mutandis* by the Deuteronomic Historian. The prophets were originally Persian propagandists, and since there were no actual kings at the time of the struggle in the fifth century, kings stood for Baals, the divine kings of their followers, just as Yehouah was for His. When the Deuteronomic Historian wrote his propagandist history bringing the Baals down to earth, he represented them as mythical kings, whose proper allegiance was to Yehouah. David and Solomon might have been popular gods in Yehud before the Persian reforms. Solomon was surely a Canaanite sun god, and David a southern Canaanite Thoth or Hadad. Both were depicted as near perfect followers of Yehouah rewarded by success, but yet subject to the usual faults.

The first king, Saul, is depicted as a bad king, incompetent and disobedient to God. He reigned only two years according to *1 Samuel* 13:1, and then God replaced him with his own choice. God designates David as king and the Merlin of the time, Samuel, anointed him.

Many of the later monarchs were shown as being disloyal not only to God but also to the people, making sinful alliances with foreign powers. Vassalage treaties prevented the subject states from making other alliances, so kings were shown as making illegal alliances to show that they defied God's wishes—all part of the aim of discouraging native kings. God was their king—the Persian king His agent.





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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?**  
**Judges: a Book of the Persian Period**

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### **The Setting and Nature**

The 480 years from the Exodus to the building of the temple is based on 12 40 year generations from Moses to David. The period of Judges has to be long enough for this to work, but the actual period of Judges when Ezra impressed the law was only about 100 years long. If any of the names in the book represent real judges under the Persians, they must have been local magistrates not rulers over the whole country. Roman writers tell us that the ruling magistrates in Carthage in this same period were called “suffetes”. The Hebrew word for judge is “shopet”. The only difference is about 800 years of time if the biblical chronology is to be believed.

The Persian judges were probably the same as the Roman procurators—men appointed to local taxation districts to keep order by dispensing justice but also collecting tithes. It seems they failed and the idea of a central collection point for taxation in the temple state of Jerusalem was substituted. The period of the judges was then mythologized when the tales of the combating factions were substituted for the more mundane administration by the agents of the Persian king. The writers and compilers of the book were later than Ezra and intended to use the book as propaganda to get the natives to adopt the new religion of the temple.

*Judges* is a mixed bag of stories purporting to be about the time before Israel had a king, as the final section emphasizes repeatedly, collected together in three parts the central one of which was original and contains the stories, the beginning being a later introduction and the end a later appendix, or rather not an appendix but an artificial way of splitting the beginning of *Samuel* from the last of the judges. Eli and Samuel were judges themselves and so ought to be part of the book of Judges, and the enemy continues to be the Philistines from Samson into Samuel. The discourse in *Samuel* 12 looks to be the proper end of *Judges*.

### **Divisions and Editions**

The three parts are 1:1-2:5, 2:6 to 16:31 and chapters 17 to 21. The first part gives some information about the supposed tribal areas by way of scene setting, but was probably written in the Greek period as Greek words like Talmi (Ptolemy) and Kitron suggest. Indeed, if Kitron refers to the citron (*Citrus Medica*), the place and the text is dated to after the fourth century when these citrus fruits were introduced from Persia (whence the qualifier “Medica” or Medea), where they had come to from India. The second is the stories of thirteen judges. The main six tell of God’s wrath at the apostasy of Israel. This is the method of the Deuteronomist writer in the Persian period. The last part is not about judges but about the religious and social conditions, and shows antipathy to Dan and the Benjaminites. The author’s interests are Levitical. He is of the Priestly school (P) and the appendix was therefore written in the Greek period.

The traditional sources seen in the *Pentateuch* are labelled J, E, D, and P. Often the J source (Yehouah) is seen as southern and Yehouistic while the E source is northern and prefers Elohim as the name of God. While there is some truth in this, the main point is that there were two initial factions when these legends were being considered for publication. One faction preferred El as the name of God and one preferred Yehouah. This could hardly have mattered to Canaanites for whom both were perfectly respectable gods, El the High God, and

Yehouah one of his sons.

It came to matter when the Persian colonists came to impose a single high god as a god of heaven and the universe and whose agent was the Persian Shahanshah. El, the Canaanite High God seemed the obvious choice, but there was a faction who preferred Yehouah, perhaps the Persian administrators themselves, and eventually the Yehouah faction succeeded. Before God was named as Yehouah however, there was a period when both factions wrote their own accounts, and there was probably a period when it was expedient to use a combined name Yehouah Elohim—"Yehouah of the Gods", the gods being sons of El. For that reason we have a J source and an E source.

Whatever was written by these original sources has been overwritten or edited by D (the Deuteronomistic school of editors) and then by P the Priestly school of editors). The creator of Judaism was the editor D, who followed the strict law imposed in the Persian period by Ezra, called *Deuteronomy*.

The Deuteronomistic editor probably compiled the assembly of stories and gave them their moralistic slant because they were meant for the native people, who worshipped their own Baalim and Ashtaroth, and this was depicted as an apostasy from their proper god who was Yehouah. The Priestly editors refined the sacerdotal cult of Jerusalem at a later date, when the innovations of the Deuteronomists had been generally accepted. The likely time of the Priestly school was in the mid-third century BC when the Egyptian Greek kings, the Ptolemies, favoured the Jerusalem cult, and published its books of laws in Greek.

## **Ezra and Chronology**

The chronology is utterly artificial and the Deuteronomistic style is continuous in the main part of the book: the people offend God by apostasy, God punishes them by the hand of an enemy, the people cry to God in distress, God sends a saviour, and the people have a period (typically 40 years) of peace before the cycle begins again. Joshua is obedient to God's wishes and is victorious, but the people are disobedient and suffer even though God patiently sends saviour after saviour. The Deuteronomist has the idea in his mind of a saviour, and the salvation pattern is repeated. The idea of saviours was well established in Zoroastrian religion, so its origin is evident and proof that the stories are from the Persian period. If salvation was so popular 700 years beforehand, it is hard to see why it took until the Persians came for it to catch on.

A legendary saviour is recorded in the biblical books as returning with Zerubabel—he is the High Priest, Joshua ("Yehouah Saves"). This is the time when the rulers of the Canaanites in the Palestinian hills placed an emphasis on salvation. In fact, we argue elsewhere that Joshua is probably merely another title of Zerubabel who is himself the mythical Saoshyant of the Zoroastrian religion—Zoroaster reincarnated. The purpose seems to have been that the colonists who "returned" to Yehud were participating in an eschatological act by setting up a temple to Yehouah and making it work. By doing so they would make the path of the Saoshyant easier. The leading magi of Zoroastrianism, those from the holy city of Rhages itself, were entitled "Zoroaster" and it seems that a Zoroaster returned to give the native people of the land a new covenant with God and the law to accompany it that they all had to obey. The man was Ezra, the Zoroaster of Babel or Zerubabel. In *Judges*, we read that the natives were not impressed and resisted the imposition by banditry and sedition, though the nature of the resistance has been exaggerated too.

In the years between the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezzar and the imposition of the Law of Moses

by Ezra, the native inhabitants of the Palestine hills had been bypassed by history. They were few and unimportant, but they were Canaanites and followed the religious customs of the Canaanites whose most famous people were the Phœnicians. Naturally, they had their own stories based on their own religious myths and doubtless some heroes, but history did not start for them until the Persians conquered the Babylonians. The Babylonians had never bothered to rebuild Jerusalem and used Mizpah as the regional capital. According to *Nehemiah*, the city was still ruined in the middle of the fifth century. So, despite the much vaunted decree of Cyrus, the Persians had done little for about a hundred years to restore Jerusalem. The natives were later to be called the Am ha Eretz, a disparaging term meaning the men of the land, and probably punning on Mother Earth, a goddess of whom they were fond. They had tales to tell about their poor treatment under various conquerors, the most immediate of whom were the Persians. The Persians sent in colonists to set up a temple and administrative district in their midst in the time of Darius II, and the locals were expressly denied any chance to participate in the project, probably unless they converted to the new cult. Most did not want to.

The two threads therefore were that of the natives who saw El as the high god, even though they also worshipped others too such as the goddesses and Yehouah, and the “returners” who preferred Yehouah, perhaps because it had echoes of Vohu and Vahu (“v” pronounced “oo”) and therefore of Darayavahu, the Persian king.

The school of the Deuteronomists no doubt worked at their didactic history for a long time, so even though Ezra returned and dedicated the new city and temple in 417 BC, much of the history will not have emerged till considerably later, towards the end of Persian rule, which ended with the victory of Alexander in 332 BC after the siege of Tyre.

In *Judges* we find a mish-mash of stories from the viewpoint of the native Canaanites mainly. They are stories of heroes and gods, brought down to earth by an editor who has only one god of significance, yet allowed to stand in these legends with some nobility as a foil to the apostasy of the people. The Persian aim was to keep the people peaceful, and they hoped that in a generation or two, under the new Persian admiring God, they would be. They were.

## **The Introduction**

The introduction, *Judges* 1-2:5, tells that Judah was declared to have been sent to clear out the Canaanites, and it depicts the conquest as occurring through two tribal movements, that of Judah and its allies founding the temple state of Judah, and that of the tribes of Joseph settling in what was to become Samaria (Israel). It thus gives a spurious basis for the two kingdoms that contradicts the conquest of Joshua, a more elaborate attempt to justify the kingdoms. All the other tribes are in Canaan subject to the Canaanites. That is unsurprising—they all were Canaanites.

The settlers are trying to displace the locals from whole swathes of land, and the author blames their failure on a universal apostasy. The hand of two different editors seems clear by the personification of Judah and Israel, or the use of sons of Judah and sons of Israel, translated as “men of” or “people of”. The very first sentence is plainly added because the story resumes from *Joshua* where he is dismissing the people after his speech in *Judges* 2:6.



This introduction was probably written by the priests at a much later date than the main compilation, in the third or even the second century BC. Various parts of Palestine had been named, doubtless as taxation districts. The basis of the names was mythologized as the names of the original tribes. In the first five verses of chapter 2 the author establishes his theme—entrapment—God provides the old gods to tempt the people into apostasy, thereby inviting his anger!

In the historical myth of the Jews, David captures Jerusalem sometime before the millennium, but in *Judges* 1:8, supposedly around 100 years earlier, Jerusalem is already captured and burned by the sons of Judah, showing that the myths of David were additions. The sons of Judah will have originally been the sons of Yehouah, meaning worshippers of the new god—the colonists sent to rule Yehud, probably as a punishment for the natives rebelling (with the Egyptians in all probability, whence the depiction of the Egyptians as natural enemies of the Israelites). The city was destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar, and supposedly stayed destroyed until the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, but here might be evidence that the Am ha Eretz had begun to restore Jerusalem and the colonists destroyed it again. That would offer an explanation of why Nehemiah reacted to the destruction, apparently 150 years after Nebuchadrezzar, as if it was recent (Neh 1:3).

Judah moves into Palestine from Jericho, the city of palm trees, along with the Kenite, Moses's father in law, Jethro, whose own ancestor was Midian (Mede). Kenite in the accepted mythology is a blacksmith, as Cain was, but what does it really mean? The root pertains to "owning" or "possession" and "begotten", so seems related to our word "kin". If that is the case, it is unlikely to be Semitic and probably is a Persian word. The Kenites are supposed to have settled in the Negeb—*Numbers* 24:21-22 might imply Petra—but evidently came from across the Euphrates, for Heber (Eber), the Kenite of *Judges* 4:11, lived in the far north, Hemath (Hamath) was the Kenite who founded the sect of the Rechabites, and Balaam prophesied their abduction by Assyria. The Kenites were shown mercy when the Amalekites were destroyed (1 Sam 15:6), implying that they were allies or perhaps kinsmen of the Amalekites. Thus they seem to have been colonists moved into Abarnahara by the Persians and considered kinsmen of the Jews.

In *Judges* 1:18, the Jews rapidly expanded to capture the main cities of the Philistines, the people who later in the book and in *1 Samuel* give the sons of Israel a lot of grief. Judah never ruled over the Philistine cities until the time of the Maccabees, and in the province of Abarnahara, the Philistine coastal plain was administered from Sidon. Thus in the story of Samson, the Philistine god is Dagon, a Phœnician god, depicted as half man and half fish. Is it merely coincidence that the Babylonian god, Ea, was pictured as half man and half fish too? In Greek, Ea was given as Oannes, and in Hebrew, Yah, Yehu, and, like the Greek, Yohannah. If Dagon was Ea and so was Yah, then Yah was Dagon! The Syrians, according to authorities like Lucian, Plutarch and Diodorus Siculus, would not eat fish, which they considered sacred. Totem animals, animals that stand for a people's god, are never eaten except on ritual occasions. Poor people only had animal protein on the feast days when the animals were sacrificed and some sold off in butchers as additional income for the priesthood. The Persian law of *Deuteronomy* (*Dt* 4:18), introducing a new image for Yehouah as Ahuramazda, forbids the making of images of fish!

In *Judges* 1:22-29, the invasion is depicted with no mention of Joshua or a widespread planned campaign of conquest. This is the tradition before the legendary Joshua was invented probably in Ptolemaic times based on the earlier legend of the saviour priest Joshua, of *Haggai* and *Zechariah*. Yet the capture of Bethel in *Judges* 1:22-26, is itself late, because Bethel was not even founded until the second half of the fifth century BC.

The story might be a romanticized account of how the land came into the possession of the colonists. Even *Joshua* has no account of the capture of Bethel, but if the colonists founded it under the name Bethel, which means the House (temple) of El, it suggests that their initial aim was to make El into the local Ahuramazda. In *Judges* 2:1 the “Angel of the Lord” appears. It is a concept that could only have come in the Persian period because it is Spenta Mainyu, the Holy Spirit of Ahuramazda. The concept of angels is Persian. A move of sanctuary from Gilgal to Bochim is led (Jg 2:1-5) by the Angel of the Lord, but Bochim is Bethel in the Septuagint, so here is a peaceful move to Bethel. The stones of Gilgal were supposedly set up by the earliest Israelites crossing the Jordan, probably a folk tale to explain an ancient stone age henge.

Since the whole story is allegorized, the fortresses of the Canaanites need not have meant their military might but their adherence to their religion. The colonists had to live among people who refused to give up their veneration of Baals and Ashtoreths. The fortresses were metaphorical fortresses of the Canaanite religion. At this point in *Judges*, there is a lot of emphasis on sun-worship. Beth-Shemesh means the temple of the sun god, Shemesh (Samson), and words like “Heres” imply sun worship (from the Indo-European Hur, Surya).

### **The Deuteronomist’s Introduction**

*Judges* 2:6 to 3:6 is the Deuteronomist compiler’s own introduction. The repetition in *Judges* 2:6-10 of *Joshua* 24:29-31 is the point at which *Joshua* is meant to join *Judges*, showing that what went between was an addition. *Joshua* will have been meant to end at *Joshua* 24:28.

*Judges* 2:11-19 express the compiler’s own imperative of divine judgement—God punishes sin and apostasy by disaster. He describes the Canaanite cults and issues dire warnings. The failure of the colonists to destroy the cults, that is persuade or coerce the Am ha Eretz to convert, meant that they remained as a temptation, deliberately left by God. The instructions given in *Deuteronomy* 12:2-4 are clear:

Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their Asherim with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.

In verse 2:16, we read that Yehouah raised up judges to save the people. It is beyond coincidence that the law given by Ezra, on the chronology presented here, considered to be *Deuteronomy*, declares with firmness:

Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

The Persians were strict administrators of justice. These words are addressed to a person not a people because they are written singularly. They must have been meant for the ruler of the province, but though the author of *Deuteronomy* puts them in the mouth of Moses (Ezra) addressing a crowd, the source was plainly a document addressed to the person who would administer the law, not to a crowd. It was probably an instruction from the

Persian king to his provincial ruler, the Satrap of Abarnahara.

The distinction between the native inhabitants and the colonists who are the remnant is made clear in *Judges* 2:20,22; 3:4, where the covenant is also mentioned—the one introduced and enforced by Ezra. Israel was tested and found to mix with the nations who were left as a test. Of course, Israel was a Canaanite nation and it was the captives who really mixed with the natives (*Jg* 3:6) leading to Ezra's drastic action, but here Ezra could not be mentioned. It was supposed to be 700 years earlier! And it is even possible, depending on which editor was amending this part, that the redactor already did not understand the true nature of what he was editing.

## The Early Judges

In *Judges* 3:7-11, Othniel is the “saviour” sent to deliver Israel from the hands of Cushan-rishathaim, the king of Mesopotamia, in short, the king of Persia. This might specifically have been Cambyses, the son of Cyrus who conquered Egypt. The mention of the “sons of Israel” and “Israel” in these stories is considered an anachronism created by later editing, the stories supposedly being before there was any state of Israel, a product of the division of the united monarchy of David and Solomon, according to the biblical myth. Seen properly, they are not anachronisms, and it is the artificial retrogression of the stories that seems to make them anachronistic.

Othniel had the Spirit of the Lord, showing it is later than the Persian conquest. The inhabitants of Abarnahara, the Hebrews, learnt from the Persians that people were subject to influences from good and from evil spirits. Othniel ruled for the legendary forty years, but each time a good judge died, the people reverted to their Baals and Asherahs and God got angry. Among the punishers are the Amalekites, always supposed to be Arabs, but the name suggests they are the “King's Men”, Persian policemen or officials.

In *Judges* 3:15, the next saviour is Ehud with a scheming plot to assassinate the king of Moab by thrusting him through with a sword hidden under Ehud's robe, on the unexpected side because he was left-handed. Moab was subdued for two generations (80 years). The city of palms (Jericho) appears again though it had supposedly been knocked down by Joshua's holy trumpets only a few decades before.

The “sculptured stones” or “quarries” of *Judges* 3:19,26 are euphemisms for the henge or standing stones which made Gilgal a noted sanctuary. The name of the obese enemy, Eglon, is “calf” and that is what it was. Ehud stabbed a sacred cow—not a human king but a divine king—a god. In conjunction with the previous pun suggesting Cambyses, we see here a recollection of anti-Persian, specifically anti-Cambyses propaganda. Cambyses is said by his Egyptian and Greek enemies to have killed the Apis bull, as well as his own brother, so he is a double villain. Curiously the average lifetime of an Apis bull was 18 years, the length of time Eglon was supposed to have ruled Israel.

In *Judges* 3:31 is a brief mention of another Judge, obviously inserted. Shamgar killed 600 Philistines with an ox-goad. He is a son of Anath, the consort of El. He is plainly the sun god, Shamesh or Samson, given a slightly variant name.

## Deborah

In *Judges* 4:1 to 5:31 appears two accounts of the claim to fame of the judge, Deborah, the first in prose then one in verse. Many commentators declare the poem to be the oldest text in the bible because of its obscure words and its apparently northern dialect, but the fact that it is a dialect could be entirely the reason for its obscure words. One wonders whether some of its difficult words could be Iranian. It certainly has more Aramaic words than classical Hebrew, suggesting youth rather than antiquity. Scholarly opinion is coming round to seeing it as not so old. The mention of Sinai (*Jg* 5:5) is added by an harmonizing editor.

The king of the Canaanites is called Jabin, but there is no evidence that the Canaanites were ever united under a single king. The Canaanites would often call their god their king. Thus a Phœnician god was called Melqart, meaning King of the City, and Moloch might have been the same, or similar god. So Jabin was possibly a Canaanite god not a Canaanite king. But, in the poem, Jabin does not appear at all and the Canaanite king is Sisera, who is the Canaanite general in the prose version. Sisera is taken to mean a youth but it is not a Semitic name and appears only one other place—in the genealogies of *Ezra-Nehemiah* as the patriarch of a returning family. Jael can be read as “Yehouah is El” (or God) and Jabin as “Yehouah is Son”.

The hints suggest an allegory of a struggle between two factions, one wanting Yehouah to be seen as the High God and the other wanting Yehouah to remain as he is in the Canaanite pantheon, the son of El—so El remains the High God. It is not uncommon for sons of gods to replace their fathers in mythology. Jabin is defeated and the “Yehouah is God” faction succeed. The importance of women in the story might suggest that women favoured the “Yehouah is God” faction.

Deborah seems to be an Indo-European word meaning the “Goddess is Our Lady”, or “The Divine Lady”. “Deborah” now means “bee” but that might be because she was the mother goddess, as *Judges* openly declares:

The leaders ceased in Israel. They ceased until I, Deborah,  
arose. I arose as a mother in Israel.

*Jg* 5:7 Lit

The attendants of mother goddesses were called bees as they were for Cybele and Diana. The Goddess Neith, one of the more important deities in Lower Egypt where the bee was the symbol of kingship, had a temple known as “the House of the Bee”.

Von Soden (*The Ancient Orient*) is categorical that, although the designation “judge” was granted to goddesses, not a single instance of a practicing female judge has ever been found in any ancient near eastern text. The case of Deborah, in the bible, is therefore so unique, it suggests that Deborah was indeed a goddess and not a human woman.



She is described in *Judges* 4:5 as if she were an idol or standing stone beneath a palm tree called “The Palm of Deborah” in Bethel. She could not have been in the Judæan hills originally if she lived beneath a palm, unless

an oak was meant, but she could have been at Jericho. There is another Deborah in the Jewish scriptures. She is a nurse, the nurse of Rebekah. She died and was buried beneath a tree named Allon-bachuth (*Gen 35:8*), the “Tree of Weeping” or the “Oak of Weeping” also in Bethel. The Hebrew word “allon” can mean any large tree, or an oak tree specifically.

Demeter played the role of the nurse to the infant Iacchus. The story of Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, who died after Jacob had set up the altar at Bethel, and was therefore presumably nurse to the twins Jacob and Esau, sounds like a remnant of a story like that of Demeter making the child Brimo, who is Bacchus or Iacchus, immortal. Iacchus is obviously Jacob. Iacchus is Dionysus and is also Dendrites, “Of Trees”.

Neither prose nor poem is easy to understand. One suspects the earthly struggle between gods was cast as a cosmic battle but later was brought back to earth in a particular locality, not convincingly. Megiddo and Kadesh are both mentioned, the scenes of legendary battles. Particularly in the poem, Deborah sounds like a war goddess, like Anahita, and significantly she permits “new gods” to be chosen (*Jg 5:8*). Neith’s symbol was a pair of crossed arrows over a shield, and her role is described in the Hymn to Neith preserved at the Esna temple, where she procreates the god, Ra, who is also called Khepri in the morning and Atum in the evening.

Of course, Yehouah is eternal so cannot have a mother, and it seems here that the bible has an old myth about a war in heaven and the creation of a new good god, but the god has had to be omitted. In the Babylonian Creation Myth, in which Marduk defeats Tiamat in the heavenly battle, Marduk is assisted by the Great Goddess Aruru who eventually makes Gilgamesh and his companion, Enkidu. Possibly Deborah is a version of the Babylonian goddess, Aruru, identified also with the Egyptian goddess Neith. She appears again as Aseneth, the wife of Joseph, who seems to be Horakhty, the morning sun.

Deborah might have stood for a women’s movement. They were devoted to a goddess who refused to accept El as the almighty god, preferring to elevate his son, Yehouah, whom they held in higher regard, perhaps because they associated Yehouah with Tammuz. The final sentence is a description of Mithras in its mention of the sun, “might” and particularly “friends”. Perhaps Mithras was seen as the Persian version of Tammuz.

The women were to be disappointed because when Yehouah was made into the local Ahuramazda, he was recast as El, not Mithras, but was even less sympathetic than the High God, because he took more interest in his Chosen People than El ever did, and he was jealous! It took Christianity to restore Mithras as the popular Son in the form of Jesus. Deborah’s husband’s name, Lappidoth, means “torches”, or “lightnings”, and Barak means “lightning”. They are references to a sky god like Zeus, though the torches could be the upturned and downturned torches of the torchbearers in Mithraic iconography, standing for opposites like day and night, summer and winter and life and death.

It seems that the aim of the author was to cast old gods as earthly heroes, so that the One God could be one only while the people could still respect their old gods as heroes. Christians have done the same with some saints.

## **Gideon**

In *Judges 6:1 to 8:28* is the story of Gideon who is a son of Joash and one of the sons of Ezra because he is



an Abiezrite ("My father is Ezra"). To be an Abiezrite is not necessarily to be a real son or even a descendent, but to be in the brotherhood of Ezraites—the followers of Ezra. Joash is Joshua, so here are references to the occasion when Ezra returned and read out the law, and Joshua was mythically the first High Priest of the second temple. The oppressors in this story however are the Midianites (Medes), the Amalekites (King's men) and the men of the east, references at this time, to the Persian conquerors, who come up with their cattle, like locusts. In *Judges* 6:33, they are encamped in the Valley of Jezreel, a mythical name for Israel.

The implication is that here is a story from the side of the Am ha Eretz, some of whom took to banditry rather than accept the new cult and the Persian rule. Later in *Judges*, Jephthah is also depicted as being a bandit. Addressing the angel of the Lord in *Judges* 6:13, Gideon expresses his skepticism of the Persian cult and its propaganda:

Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

Gideon is so skeptical he even insists on twice testing the Lord, an utterly forbidden act (Dt 6:16) that must show this story to have been a mockery originally. The battle that Gideon wins is also a mockery, making out that the enemy are scared out of their wits, and 135,000 Medes and Persians are killed and scattered by 300 opponents who survive without loss. Doubtless Gideon led a small band of outlaws and his enemies have been multiplied.

Yet the sacrifices offered by Gideon are Persian, the meat being boiled not roast. The Angel of the Lord is present at the sacrifice and rises up to heaven with the flames, which are therefore seen as the good mediator between earth and heaven. The two supposed leaders of the Medes killed at first are scavengers, the Raven (Oreb) and the Wolf (Zeeb), animals that picked at carcasses left out, Persian fashion, to be picked dry.

So, what seems to have been a Samaritan story of a bandit hero's exploits against the Median oppressors has been turned round by an editor who makes him acceptable by destroying altars to Baal and Asherah (Jg 6:25), Canaanite gods, which he does by night and without the knowledge of his family, showing clearly he was of the Canaanite breed. The altar is then dedicated to the new god by sacrificing a bull, in the Persian saviour's fashion. Gideon therefore becomes Mithras whose sacrifice brings good into the world. The Canaanites want to kill Gideon for his desecration of their altars but Joash (Joshua) tells them to let the god fight for himself, a lesson that all defenders of gods should learn, but none do.

Now appears some confusion and curious folk etymology. Because Joash has said that the Baal should fight for itself, Gideon is called Jerubaal, which supposedly means "Let Baal Fight". In fact, it looks like a corruption or a pun. It is really Zerubabel. In *Haggai* and *Zechariah*, Joshua and Zerubabel are linked so inseparably that they might have been originally different titles of the same man, so it is curious that obvious corruptions of Joshua and Zerubabel should be linked here. Plainly it was Joash who said, "let Baal Fight", and he it should be who is given the nickname, but it is transferred to Gideon, and an editor has to make it clear (Jg 7:1).

Only 300 men chase off a large army by making strange noises in the night! The places of flight mentioned in the stories are unknown, as are many places in the scriptural stories, though biblicists will identify every place



mentioned.

J Pedersen sees the Jerubaal story as relating a conflict between supporters of Yehouah and Baal over a sanctuary eventually falling to Yehouah. He also sees *Judges* as fragments of legends telling of local wars and the feats of local heroes after the settlement, but the settlement was in the Persian period not in the late bronze or early iron ages.

The compiler of this eclectic collection of stories makes many allusions to *Exodus* and uses many of its constructions. One editor calls the people the sons of Israel while the other simply calls them Israel, and the first seems to be moralistic in blaming God's reactions on to the people's failings while the other is more generous. These might be the different attitudes of the original writer who was sympathetic to Israel, while the later editor was sympathetic to the colonists and blamed the people for God's actions.

In *Judges* 8:14, a captured young man is expected to be able to write and writes down the names of officials. Today, this would not be surprising but in 1200 BC few people could write. It suggests the story is much later than it purports to be. The crescents on the camels in *Judges* 8:21 might suggest moon worshippers.

Here Gideon, who seems to have the name or title Zerubabel, refuses to be made king whereas, to judge by Haggai, Zerubabel was made king. Either way, the suggestion is that Zerubabel is a rebel against the Persians. Gideon is happy to leave god as the ruler but nevertheless makes a golden idol that the people worship at Ophrah. Gideon is depicted as having 70 sons, implying that Gideon himself is the High God, or perhaps his earthly agent, because 70 was supposed to have been all the nations of the earth. El similarly had 70 sons, and this appears in *Deuteronomy* 32:8-9, where Yehouah is one of the national gods, sons of El.

## **Abimelech**

Despite all these sons, Gideon has a special son born at Shechem called Abimelech, meaning "My Father is King". The people returned to apostasy immediately worshipping Baal-berith, a god whose name is "Lord of the Covenant!" In *Genesis* 35:4, Jacob received his allegiance to the "God of the Covenant" at Shechem. The covenant was that made by Joshua (*Josh* 24:25; *Dt* 27) who is the mythologized priest of *Haggai* and *Zechariah* that introduced the new god—Ezra. The whole story seems to have begun as a tale of the Am ha Eretz struggling against the Persian colonists, but later reworked to fit the established view. Shechem was probably the site of the original worship of the new Persian inspired god, or perhaps was the first of several that were originally set up, before a decision was taken to centre activity on Jerusalem. Abimelech was meant to stand for the loyal followers of the Persian king, and therefore of the imported god, Yehouah, whose first sanctuary was at Shechem.

The story of Abimelech in *Judges* 9:1-6 has the hallmark of reworked mythology. Essentially it is how the people of Shechem who had worshipped another goddess and various baals were beguiled into supporting Abimelech, the one god against the many gods. Abimelech was made king at Shechem. It seems though that the people of Shechem, after three years turned to another god, Gaal. Now Gaal, unless it is a deliberate corruption of baal, means beetle, so might have been an Egyptian deity associated with the scarab beetle. Equally it might be a corruption of Gaddel meaning "El is Good Fortune", as possibly Gideon is too. The people had not been impressed by their three years of devotion to Abimelech and were much happier under the aegis of the Beetle,

and again voices urged the people to fight the Persian invaders. Zebul is, of course, another Baal, or perhaps is none less than El himself, the “Lord of the Mansion of Heaven”, (Baalzebul) and it seems that worshippers of this baal allied with worshippers of Abimelech and they attack the city at dawn, the time when Mithras was worshipped. The shadows of the mountains, as the sun rises, seem to attack Gaal, and the rival god is driven out.

Note the mysterious unknown place “Arumah” in *Judges* 9:31,41, which is “Tormah” in the Hebrew bible, and probably the Hormah of *Judges* 1:17. In Hebrew, the letters “t” and “h” are easily mistaken if the scribe is careless, and a leading “a” is simply a glottal stop or unaspirated “h” as in the English “hour”, so “Hormah” (“Arumah”) and “Tormah” are recognizably the same, and are suspiciously like Ahuramazda in this context. “Tormah” in Hebrew also sounds like a pun on the law of Moses, “Tohramohsha”. The word “Torah” was only used to mean “law” in the Persian period, and its supposed etymological derivation from the older word for “to cast” (as in casting runes for divine guidance) is invented to explain its sudden unexplained appearance.

For their apostasy, the people of Shechem were murdered and the city razed and sown with salt, as the Romans did to Carthage. Now a Tower of Shechem appears, apparently not in Shechem which has already been destroyed, unless the chronology is adrift. If these are legends based on internecine struggles in the earlier Persian period, the chronology would have been less important than the individual incidents. The tower was the stronghold of the “house” of El-berith, where “house” can mean the people of El-berith as in the “house of David”, or can mean the temple of El-berith. El-berith, as we have seen, means the “God of the Covenant!” Abimelech sets the tower on fire and burns the besieged inhabitants to death.

What is to be made of this confusion? If El-berith is the obvious God of the Covenant, Yehouah, either the people are being named from the time before they apostatized, or an incident in which the newly faithful to the imposed god were attacked by the Am ha Eretz has been re-written to reverse the incident. At a later date this would have been possible, especially after the end of Persian rule, because those who wrote the originals were long dead and the new Greek rulers were intent on harmonization. So this dastardly deed could have been first meant to signify a victory for the apostates over the followers of the God of the Covenant, and might have been the very reason why Shechem was so severely treated when the worshippers of Yehouah finally beat them. Finally, a similar siege of a tower in a town called Thebez leads to the death of Abimelech when a woman in the besieged tower drops a grinding stone on his head. This is Abimelech’s punishment for killing his seventy brothers, but is doubtless added by the moralising editor, who does not want to anyone to see Abimelech as standing for Yehouah.

Note that in Mount Zalmon and the earlier Zalmunna, who was killed by Gideon, we have another Canaanite god, Shalmi, the evening sun or star, doubtless shown here as defeated by Yehouah and forced to His assistance.

Shamir in *Judges* 10:1-2 might be the original Samson, of whom nothing was known but who was represented as Hercules under Greek influence. If the place means anything, it is a reference to Samaria, on this biblical chronology, at least 200 years before it was founded. In reality, these stories were written at least 400 years after Samaria was founded.

## **Jephthah**

Now, the people of Abarnahara, the Hebrews, before the Persians came were child sacrificers. In the modern day we take the moral high ground in respect of the proper treatment of children, but we are utterly hypocritical about it. In the last century, we had families that were far too big, that could not be properly supported by the wage earner and so lived for most of their childhood in abject poverty and misery, often having to work 12 hours a day for a shilling when an adult would get eight, so barely easing their pauperism. This was God's intention, the bishops said.

Even today, there is little or no thought given to the millions who remain in poverty in the Third World, and our Christian leaders even think it necessary to bomb them sometimes to keep them in their place. Needless to say, children are in the firing line, but they are not our kids, they are not Christian kids, so it does not matter. Yet the people who have such uncaring views on the practical value of childhood, shudder at the thought that the Romans exposed unwanted infants to the cold night and the wolves, so that their families would not get too big, and the children who grew to consciousness did not have to starve.

The tophets of the Canaanites, might have had the same effect, incidental to the ultimately testing sacrifice parents were making to their gods. Poor families might have sacrificed their children in the hope of more of their god's favour. And they got a little, because they had one mouth less to feed. The story of Jephthah the Gideonite, who sacrificed his daughter (Jg 11:30-34) for Yehouah's aid in warfare, is a justification of Canaanite child sacrifice, barely altered into a warning against foolish promises to do such things. The priestly editor makes it a justification for a women's festival (Jg 11:40) to replace the annual wailing of the death of Tammuz. Yet child sacrifices were prescribed in *Exodus 22:29-30* when God demands:

The firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto Me. Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep: seven days it shall be with his dam; on the eighth day thou shalt give it Me.

Ezekiel accepts that this was the correct interpretation and that the sacrifice was by fire, as it was for the Phœnicians, but he pretends that Yehouah did it out of pique because of the apostasy of the people!

Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live; And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the Lord.

This, of course, refutes everything that a Christian believes about God and yet comes from one of the holy prophets so must be true! Yet Jeremiah, obviously writing much later despite accepted biblical chronology, makes a point of refuting it as something Yehouah could never have even thought of, and tries to give the exact opposite impression:

For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the Lord: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it. And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind.

The third part of *Isaiah*, that no one denies is in the Persian period, nevertheless tells us that the practice was

continuing then:

Are ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood. Enflaming yourselves with idols under every green tree, slaying the children in the valleys under the cliffs of rocks?

Circumcision, a practice long known to the Egyptians, and doubtless practiced from time to time and by certain people in Palestine, was declared obligatory as a replacement for the actual sacrifice of children. A notional castration would devote the child to God and no death was necessary. Circumcision was not a practice of the Persians but seems to have been accepted as the lesser of two evils. Better to lose a bit of superfluous skin than to be tossed to the flames of the Tophet.

We find many cross references to *Exodus* and *Numbers* suggesting that the editor was involved with the addition of the story of Moses to the bible. Equivalent glosses have been added to *Deuteronomy* 2. In *Judges* 10:6, the people again apostatize worshipping “Baalim and Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the Gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines”. The places mentioned here are a perfect specification of the Persian province of Abarnahara, and a virtual confession that the people addressed are indeed the Hebrews, but the Hebrews are all of these people of Abarnahara, not just the Jews and Israelites. Thus the god being impressed is being impressed on the whole of the nations of Abarnahara, not just the hills of Palestine. Jerusalem was the temple state of this province, to which all the people were to look, and the Jews were the administrators of the temple state. When the Persian empire was conquered, this Persian plan could no longer be pursued and the Hebrew tradition was lost everywhere except in its centre, Jerusalem.

Lionel Curtis in *Civitas Dei: the Commonwealth of God* (1938) has noted:

In the earlier records of Greece and Rome we meet the Phoenician traders everywhere scattered along the coasts of the Mediterranean. But after the fall of Carthage they seem to fade from the pages of history. Before the time of Caesar we meet the Jews in every part of the Graeco-Roman world, filling the place which the Phoenicians once occupied in the commercial life of the Mediterranean. Paul in his journeys finds a settlement of his countrymen in almost every city which he visits.

Carthage fell about the time of the Maccabees, and Jerusalem acquired the place of honour from which Tyre and Carthage had both fallen as the leading centre of Semitic civilisation, but the truth is that many Phœnicians were already Jews, if the word is given its correct meaning—worshippers of Yehouah. Is it merely a strange coincidence that one of the main “families” of Carthage was founded by a man called Mago who was a contemporary of Cyrus and Darius (550-500 BC)? The Persian kings had a secret service second to none. They were adepts at infiltrating and influencing powerful neighbours of the Persians. Mago seems likely to have been a Zoroastrian, and only a few decades later, Jerusalem was set up as the temple state of Abarnahara. From then on Phœnicians in Asia would have been converting to the worship of Yehouah and it is inconceivable that they did not influence many Phœnicians elsewhere. So, with the loss of the main city of the Canaanites in north Africa, the Phœnicians will surely have looked to Jerusalem, and those who had remained loyal to Tanis and Melkart will have turned to Yehouah.

God rejects the people utterly, promising that he would save them no more (Jg 10:13). The translators of the

Jewish scriptures do not like to use the word “save” in connection with god because that is reserved for His Son. So, the Old Testament God always “delivers” or just “helps” his people escape from their enemies. The word is the same as that one from which “hosannah”, “Essene” and “Jesus” (Joshua) derive—osea.

Anyway, the Israelites put away their foreign gods and Yehouah took pity on them again. The saviour he sent here was Jephthah, who had been rejected by his people to become a bandit in the land of Tob (Good), and whose mother was a harlot! The Tobit of the *Apocrypha* lived in Medea near the Zoroastrian holy city of Rhages! Jephthah means “He Opens” or “Yehouah Opens”, the “Opener” being an ancient name or title of God. Jephthah is not an Israelite, he is a Gileadite from east of the Jordan, so here again we have a tradition from elsewhere in Abarnahara incorporated into the scriptures that were to be the Hebrew scriptures—for all the people of the Levant and Syria. In *Judges* 11:26, however, the East Bank is declared to have belonged to the Israelites for 300 years, even though the whole period from the supposed conquest, by Joshua, to the supposed kingdom of David is less than 200 years. If Omri founded Israel in the ninth century and laid claim to parts of the East Bank, as the Moabite stone confirms, then a setting for *Judges* in the fifth century is compatible with this claim.

## Samson

Three chapters are devoted to Samson, but the final one about Samson and Delilah is certainly much later than the other stories here. Its completeness is proof enough. The other stories often give the impression of incompleteness or being fragmentary, but Samson and Delilah is a complete and well preserved fairy tale. Samson is unmistakably an Israelite Hercules. Samson belonged to the tribe of Dan which in Rabbinic astrology was under the sign of Scorpio, the sign under which the celestial Hercules rises. He might have been introduced in this form by Greeks settled in Palestine after Alexander’s conquest. Syncellus wrote:

In this time lived Samson, who was called Hercules by the Greeks.

Samson is the sun god Shemesh. Many of the places mentioned pertain to the sun cult, and Samson’s strength being in his hair equates to the strength of the sun being in its rays. Some of the stories told have their source in the solar mythology constructed about the sun’s annual journey through the heavens. In so doing, it passes through the twelve constellations having an adventure in each one. This is the origin of the twelve labours of Hercules, two of which at least are recognizable here in embryo. Samson, like Hercules, kills a lion (Jg 14:6), being the sun in Leo when the rise of the constellation at dawn is blotted out by the rise of the sun. He also calls upon God to slake his thirst and a spring opens, a suggestion of the passage of the sun through Aquarius.

The rest of the cycle has been suppressed but the Samson and Delilah story has been added. This story stands for the removal of the sun’s rays by the night (Hebrew, “laylah”), whereupon the sun loses its strength and everything becomes dark (blindness). The sun then recovers and eventually destroys the pillars of the night. The drama then repeats daily. Delilah is the “Goddess Night”, night being equated with the night hag, Lilith, ultimately the Babylonian Goddess Ninlil blackened.

In *Judges* 10:2, as if to set the right tone, we immediately meet the word “Zorah”, a word that equates with Ezra, Zoro (as in Zoroaster), Zeru (as in Zerubabel), the Indo-European, “Surya” meaning sun, and therefore qualities of the sun, “might” and “strength”. After this Persian clue, the Angel of Yehouah appears immediately (the proper name, Yehouah, is always fatuously rendered as “the Lord” by translators). In *Judges* 13:8, “Manoah intreated

the Lord and said, O Lord..." but two different words are translated "Lord".

Angels were Persian inventions, and the specific "Angel of the Lord" is clearly Spenta Mainyu, the Holy Spirit that stands for Ahuramazda—and sure enough, the angel *is* God in *Judges* 13:22. No such ideas existed in Canaan in 1100 BC when this story is supposedly set. Sometimes the angel is described as the "man of the gods", though gods is falsely translated as "God". Probably, "man of the gods" simply means angel—one of the gods (angels) appearing as a man—but the Hebrew word ("malak") normally used for angel means the same as "angel" and ought to be translated as "messenger".

The switch from polytheism to a supposed monotheism required the abandonment of "the gods" in popular usage, but by the time it was effected, it seems people had accepted "Elohim" as a name for the singular God. This probably happened when no one any longer spoke Hebrew in their daily lives, and only heard it in the temple and synagogues. *Judges* 16:28 is quite remarkable:

And Samson called unto the Lord (Yehouah), and said, O Lord (Adonai) God (Yehouah), remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God (Elohim), that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

Samson's parents sacrifice to Yehouah and see the angel ascending with the flames, a purely Zoroastrian concept—the flames of the sacred fire being the vehicle for taking messages to Ahuramazda. Originally in Mazdayasnaism, the holy flame was the domestic hearth fire, and here it is too, for the angel is invited to participate in a meal, but declines in favour of the sacrifice. The whole scene is similar to when Gideon did the same (*Jg* 6:21).

The Samson myths are a way of bringing the sun god down to earth to leave room for Yehouah as the Almighty. We can be sure that Shamesh was among the Baals worshipped by the polytheistic inhabitants of Canaan before the Persian conquest. Besides Baal, El and Astarte, the sun god had to be contended with, and the Samson stories kept the god as a hero while mortalizing him. He was however retained as specially holy by the device of having him consecrated to Yehouah from birth as a Nazirite, even though this is an obvious device because the mortal Samson is nothing more than a bullying, drinking, brawling, murderous, womanising lout. Perhaps that was how the sun god was perceived in hot arid countries, when the sun seemed irresponsible, if not cruel, at the height of the dry season.

The identification of the Philistines as uncircumcized in *Judges* 14:3 shows that this was written when the practice of circumcision was well established among the Jews. It was therefore well after the Tophet had been abandoned in favour of eighth day circumcision, and so was well into the Persian period or after it. The bees that make their nest in the lions carcase (*Jg* 14:8) are creatures of the sun, that become active when the sun is out. In the first set of tales, Samson marries an unnamed woman, but she is, of course, Delilah because she tricks the solar god just before sunset. The later tale is an elaborate reworking of this simpler original one.

The burning of the fields by tying burning brands to the tails of foxes is hardly the sort of story one wants to tell children these days, yet Samson, who openly uses a prostitute in *Judges* 16:1, is regarded as a biblical children's story. Burning the fields is what the sun does in the near east in the height of the summer, but the association with foxes so treated is suspiciously like the practice of the Romans at the spring wheat festival in



April, when they did something similar. Unless some worldly Greeks brought this story into Palestine, it could be as late as the Roman period which began when Pompey annexed the country in 63 BC. A compromise would be that it was introduced by the Maccabees who had Roman military advisers in their war with the Seleucid kings.

The original Samson cycle ended in *Judges* 15:20 with the formula, "he judged Israel 20 years". The reappearance of the termination formula at the end of chapter 16 (*Jg* 16:31) shows that the whole chapter on Samson and Delilah was added. Note that both are speaking of Israel over a hundred years before it was supposedly founded, according to biblical chronology.

## Eli

The sequence of names leading to Samuel have curious meanings. Zuph seems to be "Watcher", one of the wicked angels of Enoch, Elihu means "He is my God", Jeroham means "Pity him" and Elkanah means "God (or El) is a reed". Elkanah is the father of Samuel. Some of these names do not seem flattering, which is odd if Samuel is their object. However, El might be their object, since the story is written by the successful Yehouah faction.

The family of Elkanah make an annual journey to the sanctuary at Shiloh to worship Yehouah Sabaoth (the Persian name for Yehouah), whose priests were the two sons of the elderly Eli. Commentators note that Eli is almost a cipher in these stories. The reason is that he is the god of the sanctuary at Shiloh not the priest. Eli means "My God", possibly an abbreviation for "My God is El", Eiel. The scriptures are therefore still relating the events that led from the worship of El to the worship of Yehouah.

The ancient Canaanite gods were represented by pillars or posts and in *1 Samuel* 1:9, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, prays by a doorpost, next to which sits none other than Eli. Plainly she was praying to Eli who was represented by a post in the sanctuary at Shiloh. A later editor has added the anachronistic references to Yehouah and changed Eli into an old priest sitting by a doorpost instead of an old god represented by a post in the ground. Many of these Judges have turned out to be mortalized gods, and Eli is another. *1 Samuel* 1:16,18 seems to confirm it because Hannah was not a maidservant of the priest, but all worshippers can be called servants of their god (see her prayer in 9:11). She has the child and dedicates him to Yehouah in the editor's revision but it is plain that she originally offered the bull as a sacrifice to the god El and dedicated the child to him:

And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli.

1 Sam 1:25

In *1 Samuel* 1:20, the name of the son of Elkanah and Hannah is explained as meaning "Asked For". The same explanation suffices for the name of Saul, but it is false. The name Samuel has no implication of asking or being an answer to a prayer. On the face of it, it has the strange meaning "the Name of God", taking El here to mean God. It is more curious in the context of the hypothesis that a struggle was going on over the name of God.

Hannah sang a song of joy over her birth of a son after many years of being barren. Yehouah is the subject but there are significant references in it. God is a rock, just as Mithras was. He is the god of knowledge just as

Ahramazda was. Like Ahramazda, he judges the ends of the earth, and at the Judgement, he weighs people's deeds in the balance. Resurrection is highlighted at the centre of the song, bringing to life, raising up from Sheol, raising up from the dust and the ash heap. The wicked will be cut off in darkness. The magic number seven is also mentioned. It has eschatological connotations standing, as it does, for the joining of heaven to earth. Heaven and earth are joined by the rainbow with its seven or six colours, probably the origin of the Cinvat Bridge by which only the righteous can enter heaven. The pillars of the earth, the mountains, support the heavens—the world. Finally, he thunders in heaven and gives strength to the king and power to his messiah. This poem with its complex of ideas sounds Essenic, because it is strongly Persian coloured.

In *1 Samuel* 2:2, the sacrificial meat is boiled in Zoroastrian fashion so as not to pollute the sacred flame, which was fed only by the fat (*1 Sam* 2:15) usually from the omentum. The corruption of the priests was shown above all by their desire to roast the meat, thus polluting the sacred flame. These practices were not, of course, those of the priests of El, but those of the new religion. The aim was not to give a memorial of the ancient religion but to discourage its use, so violations of holy practice of the new religion were used to show how wicked the old one had been. Besides this, the wicked sons of Eli (El's followers) had sexual relations with the women serving the god, as they might in a fertility religion.

Eli was very old, as indeed El the god was, but the story is preparing for him to be replaced by a new young priest, Samuel. The editor in mortalizing the god makes him 98, which must have seemed old for a man, though not as old as the patriarchs who were soon to be added to the story, but further back in time. In *1 Samuel* 2:27, the priesthood said to have been promised to Eli and his line for eternity was taken from him, another reference to the god being changed, not merely the priesthood:

Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt look in distress on my habitation, on all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever.

The old god's arm is severed and with it his power, and that of his sanctuary and its people. The new god will provide prosperity, and the old god will never return. Chapter three continues the description of the decline of the god, El:

Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see. And ere the lamp of God (Elohim) went out in the temple of Yehouah, where the ark of God was...

Eli is being treated like an idol or a totem, being carried into his place, but his powers were waning. Metaphorically, the lamp of the gods was going out, in the temple of Yehouah, anachronistically, as we soon learn in *1 Samuel* 3:7:

Now Samuel did not yet know Yehouah, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him.

Here is a boy supposedly consecrated as a Nazirite to Yehouah, being guided by a great priest and judge who is depicted as faultless himself, in the rewriting, and being trained in the temple to fulfil the highest office and he has never heard of Yehouah. He had not because the god until this usurpation had been El.

When the Philistines kill off 30,000 foot soldiers of Israel and capture the ark of the covenant in Chapter four (1 Sam 4:18), the god El dies dramatically. He was toppled over backwards from his seat and his neck was broken.

## Samuel

Before this, the change had already been admitted in *1 Samuel* 4:1: "And the word of Samuel came to all Israel". The old god, El, had been replaced by Yehouah, and incidentally the curious name of the judge, Samuel, is explained. What is "the name of god" now? It is Yehouah. Yehouah is "the name of God". Yehouah is Samuel. The young god, Samuel, son of "El is a Reed", had replaced his weak cosmic father, El. The monotheistic editor could not let it be obvious that the old god had been replaced by his son, the young god, so instead of writing Yehouah when he should have, he wrote "the name of God", thus creating a great prophet of the Jewish scriptures.

The adoption of the young god has the effect of the immediate defeat of the previously all-conquering Philistines, and the return of the ark of God. To commemorate the event Samuel erects a new standing stone called Ebenezer, the "Stone of Salvation". Such a stone must have existed and this was folk ætiology because it has already been mentioned twice in verses 4:1 and 5:1.

The later editor, who is leading up to his long bogus history, has mistakenly introduced the temple of Yehouah several times when there was no such temple, even on the biblical scheme of things. Plainly, the earliest worshippers of Yehouah, the Persian colonists, had a circuit of several sanctuaries, and *1 Samuel* 7:16-17 lists them as Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah, Ramah and presumably Shiloh. Shechem is not listed, though it too seems to have been an early sanctuary.

We are in the period of the first colonists entering the hill country sometime in the fifth century BC. Their mission from the Persians was to introduce a new ethical religion to replace the fertility religions of the Canaanites. The new god, Yehouah, was represented, in this story admitting the take over, by Samuel. Canaanite gods actually dwelt in each sanctuary. Statues of them were permanently kept in shrines of stone. The colonists seemed not to have had any major center at first and worshipped their new god at the different sanctuaries listed. Canaanite gods were carried on the shoulders of the priests during religious ceremonies in palanquins made of gilded wood, resting on two long wooden poles. The Jewish Ark of the Covenant was evidently the same. If the ark of God had any meaning for the Yehouists, it was simply a mobile shrine carried from sanctuary to sanctuary, so that the worshippers knew they were worshipping the same god at each and not different local gods as before. The service performed to the image of the god was private, being in the room in the temple furthest from the entrance and the public courts, in total darkness (cf *1 Kings* 8:12). The Jewish god had no physical form, and needed no house. King Solomon supposedly erected his temple as a house for the Ark of the Covenant, but this was itself the place where God resided during the supposed wilderness years, so God did not live in the temple but in the mobile shrine that legend said was deposited in the Holy of Holies. Its decorations sound Mesopotamian rather than Egyptian though it is supposed to have been made by fugitives from Egypt, but this was the later invention.

In *1 Samuel* 8:2, the names of the sons of Samuel confirm that Samuel stands for Yehouah and a change of god from El. The first is Joel, meaning "Yehouah is God", and the second is Abijah, meaning "My Father is

Yehouah". Since his father is Samuel, Samuel must be Yehouah.

This is almost the end of *Judges*. The refined authorship of the Historian is felt from now on, inventing the mythology of the Jewish and Samaritan kings. Only the first part of the farewell address of Samuel in *1 Samuel* 12:1-6 looks to be genuine Judges tradition. Samuel dies and leaves Yehouah in his proper godly role.

Samuel says he had given Israel a king (1 Sam 12:1), seeming to mean Saul but really meaning a god as king, Yehouah. The Persians had set up the state of Yehud as a temple state ruled by God. The historian pretends though that the mythical Saul that he had introduced by an interpolation was meant. And so the history of the Jewish state continues first as pure myth and then based on the records the Persians had access to from the Assyrians. His sons are present at his final address, though the editor had already told us they were worthless, allowing him to introduce Saul and end the mythical reign of the Judges. From *1 Samuel* 12:7, the historical novel continues, beginning with the novelist summarising the story so far, as if it were Samuel's recollections. An examination of the period of the Judges in biblical history shows that it is better explained as being in the fifth century after the work of Ezra rather than in the twelfth century as traditionally considered. It reveals that a change was made from a High God called El to one called Yehouah.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?**  
**Assyria**

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## Assyria

The peoples of Assyria and its mother country, Babylonia, have the same religion, language, literature, and civilization. The Babylonians were a mixed Sumerian and Semitic race but the Assyrians were more purely Semitic, albeit mixed with some degree of Indo-European from the various Aryan invasions. The Aryans tended to remain only the rulers, however, rather than arriving in mass to swamp the native population, which therefore remained fairly purely Semitic, although the Aryan rulers introduced many Indo-European words into western Semitic vocabularies. The very name Assyria and the name of their god, Assur, look suspiciously like the Indian word, Surya, for a sun god. Whether the name Assyria is derived from that of the god, Assur, or vice versa, is not known.

Assyria occupies the northern and middle part of Mesopotamia, situated between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. The southern half, extending as far south as the Persian Gulf, is Babylonia and Chaldea. Assyria originally occupied a scant area of triangular shaped land between the Tigris and Zab Rivers, but later it conquered countries as far north as Armenia, Media in the east, northern Syria and the country of the Hittites in the west, and Babylonia and Elam in the south and southeast, occupying the entire Mesopotamian valley.

By the Hebrews, it was known under the name of Aram-Naharaim, “Aram of the Two Rivers” to distinguish it from Aram (Syria) proper, although the Hebrew name should probably be read as a plural, “Aram of the Rivers” or, if it is the supposed plural of majesty, “of the Great River”—Euphrates. In later *Old Testament* times, it was known as Assur. By the Greeks and Romans it was called Mesopotamia and Assyria, by the Aramaeans, Beth-naharim, “the house (country) of the rivers,” by the Egyptians Nahrina, by the Arabs Athur or Al-Gezilah, “the island,” or Bain-al-nahrain, the “country between the rivers”—Mesopotamia.

Assyria is mountainous and well watered, especially in the northern part. Limestone and, in some places, volcanic rock form the basis of its fertile soil. Its southern part is more level, alluvial, and fertile. Its principal rivers are the Tigris and the Euphrates, which have their source in the Armenian mountains and run almost parallel as far south as Babylonia and Chaldea, flowing into the Persian Gulf. There are other minor rivers and tributaries, such as the Khabur, the Balikh, the Upper and Lower Zab, the Khoser the Turnat, the Radanu, and the Subnat. Assyria owes its existence, life, and prosperity to the Tigris and Euphrates, as Egypt does to Nile. The principal cities of Assyria are:

- ☐ Assur whose site is now marked by the mound of Kalah-Shergat, on the right bank of the Tigris.
- ☐ Calah, the eastern bank of the Tigris and at its junction with the Upper Zab, a city built (c 1280 BC) by Shalmaneser I, who made it the capital of Assyria in place of Assur. Its site is nowadays marked by the ruins of Nimrud.
- ☐ Nineveh, represented by the villages and ruins of the modern Kujunjik and Nebi-Yunus, on the eastern bank of the Tigris, opposite Mosul. Nineveh was undoubtedly one of the most ancient cities of Assyria,

and in the time of Sennacherib (seventh cent BC) it became the capital of the empire, and the centre of the worship of Ishtar, the Assyro-Babylonian Venus, who was called Ishtar of Nineveh, to distinguish her from Ishtar of Arbela. In the Jewish scriptures the city of Nineveh is known from the prophets, and especially as the theatre of Jonah's mission.

- ❑ Dur-Sharrukin, or Dur-Sargon ("Sargon's Fortress") built by Sargon II (eighth cent BC), the founder of the Sargonid dynasty, was made first the royal residence of Sargon, and afterwards became the rival of Nineveh. It is the modern Khorsabad.
- ❑ Arhailu, or Arbela, famous in Greek and Persian annals for the decisive victory won by Alexander the Great over the formidable army of Darius, king of Persia and Babylon (331 BC).
- ❑ Nasibina, or Nisibis, famous in the annals of Nestorian Christianity.
- ❑ Harran, a merchant city, known for the worship of Sin, the moon-god, and the final capital of the rump of Assyria.
- ❑ Ingur-Bel, the modern Tell-Balawat.
- ❑ Tarbis, the modern Sherif-Khan.

## Sources of Assyro-Babylonian History

These may be grouped as:

1. The Jewish scriptures, *2 Kings*, *Chronicles*, *Isaiah*, *Nahum*, *Jeremiah*, *Jonah*, *Ezekiel*, and *Daniel*, as well as fragments of information in *Genesis* 10, 11, and 14.
2. The Greek, Latin, and Oriental writers. The Chaldeo-Babylonian priest and historian Berosus, who lived in the days of Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) and continued to live at least as late as Antiochus I Soter (280-261 BC), wrote in Greek a great work on Babylonian history, called *Babyloniaca*, or *Chaldaica*, but it has perished and only a few excerpts from it have been preserved in Greek and Latin writers. The writings of Polyhistor, Ctesias, Herodotus, Abydenus, Apollodorus, Alexander of Miletus, Josephus, Georgius Syncellus, Diodorus Siculus, Eusebius, and others are often thought legendary and unreliable by biblicists—especially Ctesias who lived at the Persian court in Babylonia—and even their quotations from Berosus are distrusted.
3. The monumental records and remains of the Assyrians and Babylonians themselves, monuments and inscriptions discovered in the nineteenth century in Babylonia, Assyria, Elam, and Egypt, which form an excellent and a most authoritative collection of historical documents.

## The Assyriologists

In 1849, Sir Henry Layard, the pioneer of Assyro-Babylonian explorations, remarked, in the preface to his classical work entitled *Nineveh and its Remains*, how a case in the British Museum, hardly three feet square, had previously enclosed all that remained of Nineveh and Babylon, with the exception of a few cylinders and gems preserved elsewhere. In fifty years in the nineteenth century, the exploration of Assyria and Babylonia had yielded the secrets of Mesopotamia—the priceless libraries of the ancient Assyrians and Babylonians, their historical annals, civil and military records, state archives, diplomatic correspondences, textbooks and school exercises, grammars and dictionaries, hymns, bank accounts and business transactions, laws and contracts, and extensive collection of geographical, astronomical, mythological, magical, and astrological texts and inscriptions. The assyriologist, professor A H Sayce, was so impressed he wrote:



The indebtedness of European culture to the valley of the Euphrates is becoming more and more apparent.

However, the purpose of the original assyriologists was not to show indebtedness of the west to Mesopotamia but to prove the historical accuracy of the bible. Victorian England was a country in which 60 per cent of the population attended church on a Sunday and all households had a bible. Yet it was facing challenges to traditional religious authority through the industrial revolution, the revelations of natural science, and the higher criticism of the bible. The reaction of the religious ruling class was to set out to prove the bible. The founders and pioneers of Assyro-Babylonian explorations were Emile Rotta (1842-45 AD), Sir Henry Austen Layard (1840-52), Victor Place (1851-55), H Rassam (1850, 1878-82), Loftus (1850), Jules Oppert, Fresnel and Thomas (1851-52), Taylor (1851), Sir Henry Rawlinson, M de Sarzec and George Smith.

These men began their assyriological investigations confident in the literal historical accuracy of the biblical narratives. The Ussherite dates printed in most Protestant bibles were perceived as useful benchmarks, but, since the numbers were based on fallible human reason, not divine revelation, they were subject to correction when challenged by pertinent extra-biblical sources, like the Assyrian eponym canon. Assyro-Babylonian inscriptions of an historical nature for the most part were dealt with as if they were factually above reproach, except when any data about "biblical" Assyria were jeopardized. No hermeneutic of suspicion about the Assyrian royal inscriptions would be exercised until the twentieth century.

[Steven W Holloway](#) of Saint Xavier University, Chicago says all of the first generation of assyriologists sought to harmonize the discoveries of the Neo-Assyrian Empire with the Assyria enshrined in the *Old Testament*. Sayce was confident they had done so, and was to pronounce the discoveries in Mesopotamia to be the death of the higher criticism!

All the archaeological research and discoveries would have been useless if the language of Assyro-Babylonian inscriptions had not been deciphered and studied. These inscriptions were all written in a language, and by means of characters, which threatened to defy all human skill and ingenuity to decipher. The language had been forgotten, and its writing seemed so bewildering that the earlier European explorers mistook the wedge shaped characters (whence their name "cuneiform") for bizarre ornamental decorations.

The discovery, and decipherment of the old Persian inscriptions at Persepolis and the Behistun rock by Rawlinson opened the way for the decipherment of the Assyro-Babylonian inscriptions. The principal credit belongs to Rawlinson and especially to Hincksn. The acute and original researches of these scholars were successfully carried out by other Semitic scholars and linguists no less competent, such as E Schrader and Fred Delitzsch in Germany, M énant, Hal évy, and Lenormant in France, Sayce and G Smith in England.

Jules Oppert, appointed Professor of Assyrian philology and archaeology at the Coll ège de France in 1869, published many articles on the chronology of biblical kings as well as commentaries on *Esther* and *Judith*. The gifted linguist, Edward Hincks, served as Rector of Killyleagh, County Down, Ireland, for 55 years. He was the first scholar correctly to identify "Jehu son of Omri" in the "Black Obelisk" inscription, and also made lively contributions to the biblical chronology debate.

Henry Creswicke Rawlinson, a British career soldier and diplomat, published dozens of articles that dealt with “biblical” Assyria in the light of Assyro-Babylonian inscriptions. In the early days of decipherment, Rawlinson confidently harmonized biblical, classical and historical Assyria into a rich tapestry of scriptural affirmation, constantly evolving with the latest revelation from the “monuments.” Texts and images alike verify the bible:

I do not doubt but that I shall be able to point out the bands of Jewish maidens who were delivered to Sennacherib, and perhaps to distinguish the portraiture of the humbled Hezekiah.

When Rawlinson was baffled by his failure to read correctly the royal Assyrian name of Shalmaneser in the cuneiform inscriptions, and influenced by *2 Kings* 17:3-6’s apparent attribution of the destruction of Israel to that king, he harmonized the royal inscriptions of Sargon—which spoke of the conquest of Samaria and the deportation of the Israelites—with the exploits of Shalmaneser recounted in Josephus and the *Old Testament*. He resorted to the traditional biblicist expedient of harmonizing the two people—Shalmaneser was a biblical alias for Sargon.

Eberhard Schrader, Professor of *Old Testament* at Zürich, Giessen, Jena, and Professor of Oriental Languages at Berlin, the father of Assyriology in Germany, published in 1872 what was among the most accessible sources of nineteenth century Assyriological research for *Old Testament* specialists. Arranged as a commentary by canonical order of biblical books, chapters, and verses, Schrader walked the reader through the Jewish scriptures, stopping wherever comparative philology, mythology, geography, or historical examples could shed light.

George Smith’s 1872 London lecture on the eleventh tablet of the Gilgamesh epic appeared in the 1873 issue of the *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* as “The Chaldean Account of the Deluge.” It captured the middle class thirst for biblical confirmation of *Genesis*. The epic was only partially recovered, however. *The Daily Telegraph* footed the bill for Smith to dig in the Mesopotamian ruins until he found the missing portions of the cuneiform tablet, and, against all rational odds, he did it. He published the text the following year.

These precious tablets and monuments these Victorian worthies uncovered and attracted such attention are scattered in all the public and private museums and art collections of Europe, America, and Turkey. The total number of is over three hundred thousand tablets, cylinders, and cuneiform inscriptions have so far been discovered. If published, they would cover 400 octavo volumes of 400 pages each. Little of it has, even now, but but even this is many times as much literature as there is in the *Old Testament*. The British Museum, the Louvre, the Imperial Museum of Berlin and the University of Pennsylvania have each of them tens of thousands of tablets, and Istabul has thousands more. In the opinion of Assyriologists, much the largest part of the Assyro-Babylonian literature and inscriptions are still buried in Iraq, the place that western Christian leaders want to dispose of with nuclear bombs. Are they afraid of Saddam or what might be found under the sand?

## Sources of Chronological Data

H C Rawlinson believed himself able to solve the puzzle of the lengths of the reigns of the Assyrian kings, and began in 1862 with a series of articles devoted to Assyrian and Babylonian chronology. During the Neo-Assyrian era, calendar years were named after a fixed rota of officials, comparable to the use of the names of Greek archons and Roman consuls for the same purpose. These eponyms were systematically recorded in lists, or

canons, sometimes with notices of military or political events. Sources of information on the chronology of Assyria are:

- ❑ The Eponym Lists which covers the entire period from the reign of Adad-nirari II (911-890 BC) down to that of Assurbanipal (669-625 BC). The eponyms, or limmu, were like the eponymous archons at Athens and the consuls at Rome. They were officers, or governors, whose term of office lasted but one year, to which year they gave their name, so that if any event was to be recorded, or a contract drawn in the year, say 763 BC, the event is registered “in the year of Pur-Shagli,” who was the limmu, or governor, in that year.
- ❑ Another source is found in the chronological notices scattered throughout the historical inscriptions, such as Sennacherib’s inscription engraved on the rock at Bavian, in which he tells us that one of his predecessors, Tiglath-pileser reigned about 418 years before him, about 1107 BC, or that of Tiglath-pileser himself, who tells us that he rebuilt the temple of Anu and Ramman, which sixty years previously had been pulled down by king Assur-dan because it had fallen into decay in the course of the 641 years since its foundation by king Shamshi-Ramman. This notice, therefore, proves that Assur-dan must have reigned about the years 1170 or 1180 BC. So also Sennacherib tells us that a seal of king Tukulti-Ninib I had been brought from Assyria to Babylon, where after 600 years he found it on his conquest of that city. As Sennacherib conquered Babylon twice, once in 702 and again in 689 BC, it follows that Tukulti-Ninib I must have reigned over Assyria in any case before 1289 BC, and possibly a few years before 1302 BC.
- ❑ Another chronological source is to be found in the genealogies of the kings, which they give of themselves and of their ancestors and predecessors.
- ❑ Further valuable help may be obtained from the so-called Synchronous History of Babylonia and Assyria, which consists of a brief summary of the relations between the two countries from the earliest times in regard to their respective boundary lines. The usefulness of this document consists mainly in the fact that it gives the list of many Babylonian and Assyrian kings who ruled over their respective countries contemporaneously.

Rawlinson had access to four overlapping canon lists. Combined, they covered the late tenth century to the beginning of Assurbanipal’s reign in the seventh century. The Assyrian eponym canon not only allowed the sequence of kings from the previously obscure ninth century monarchs to the resplendent Assurbanipal of the lion-hunt sculptures to be worked out, but it also gave information on how many years the monarchs occupied the throne. In 1872, the German academic, Schrader, published an accurate synoptic transliteration of the canons complete with dating.


## **The Language and Cuneiform Writing**

Babylonians were to the Assyrians as the Greeks were to the Romans, always more literate, most people being able to read and write. Because the Assyrians were not a literate people as a whole, like the Babylonians, they had a class of scribes to do their writing for them.

The Assyro-Babylonian language (Akkadian) belongs to the Semitic family of languages, and in respect to grammar and lexicography offers no more difficulty to the interpreter than Hebrew, Aramaic or Arabic. Assyrian is “very closely related to Hebrew, as closely related in fact as two strongly marked English dialects are to one

another," in Sayce's words. Only Phoenician, which is practically the same as Hebrew, is closer to it, and Aramaic is similar, but Arabic and the other dialects of the South-Semitic group are slightly more distant. Assyrian has a larger vocabulary and literature than Hebrew.

The principal difficulty of Assyrian is its complicated system of writing. Assyrian is written not alphabetically, but either syllabically or ideographically. The same ideographic signs came to have also the phonetic value of syllables, without losing their primitive ideographic value. Writing was on soft clay with a pointed stylus and made wedge shaped marks (hence the name "cuneiform" from the Latin, *cuneus*, a wedge) that were arranged to make characters.

So, the wedges, arranged singly or in groups, either are ideograms and stand for complete ideas or words such as ka, bar, ilu, zikara, or they stand for syllables, open or closed, simple or compound, but any character can have more than one syllabic value and as many as five or six. A sign like  may be read syllabically as ud, ut, u, tu, tam, bir, par, pir, lah, lih, hish, and his—ideographically as umu "day," pisu "white," and as Shamash, the Sungod.

This was difficult and embarrassing even to the Assyro-Babylonians themselves and is still the principal obstacle to the correct and final reading of many cuneiform words and inscriptions. To reduce the inconvenience, the Assyro-Babylonians placed other characters, called determinatives, before many of these signs to show their use and value in the sentence. Before all names of gods either a sign meaning divine being was prefixed, or a syllabic character (phonetic complement which indicated the proper phonetic value with which the word in question should end) was added after it. Reading Assyrian is still difficult. There are about five hundred of these different signs used to represent words or syllables.

Assyriologists think the cuneiform system of writing originated with the Sumerians, the primitive non-Semitic inhabitants of Babylonia, who taught it to the Semitic Babylonians and Assyrians. The Phoenicians similarly taught the Greeks the Semitic Phoenician alphabet, and the Germans adopted the Latin.

When Semitic speakers eventually replaced the Sumerian speakers, Sumerian was retained like classical Greek and Latin because it was used in religious services, and so it became the religious and scholarly language. Sumerian rituals and hymns were chanted, while an Akkadian translation allowed them to be understood. The language of Babylonia and Assyria was, therefore, written in Sumerian characters. This cuneiform system of writing was adopted also by the Medians, Persians, Mitannians, Cappadocians, ancient Armenians, and others. The unspoken Sumerian language continued in use for rituals, which had to be conducted meticulously correctly to be effective, a conservative factor making for preservation of custom well beyond its normal sell-by date. The idea of a sacred or magical language came from the retention of Sumerian as a sacred language after Akkadian became the spoken language.

Different styles of cuneiform writings have been noted. The Persian style is a direct simplified, derivative of the Babylonian introduced by the Achaemenians. Instead of a combination of as many as ten and fifteen wedges to make one sign, the Persian style never more than five, and frequently only three. Instead of writing words by syllables, sounds alone were used. The syllabary of five hundred signs was reduced to forty-two, and the ideographic style was abolished.

A language spoken in the northwestern district of Mesopotamia between the Euphrates and the Orontes, is known as Mitanni, which has been adapted to cuneiform characters. In the inscriptions of Mitanni, the writing is a mixture of ideographs and syllables just as in Mesopotamia. Tablets from Cappadocia are another modification of the ordinary writing found in Babylonia. They are written in a corrupt Babylonian. The tablets from Ugarit were found to have been written in an alphabetic cuneiform that might have preceded the Phoenician alphabet.

The material on which the Assyro-Babylonians wrote their inscriptions might be stone or metal, but usually was clay abundant in Babylonia. Thus two varieties of wedge-writing developed, one for being cut into stone and so for important statements of law and the official historical records, called lapidary, the other was cursive, occurring commonly on legal and commercial clay tablets. In Assyria, a special variety of cuneiform developed that is easily distinguished from the Babylonian by its greater neatness and the more vertical position of its wedges.

The clay was carefully prepared, finely ground, moistened, and moulded into a tablet whose size was about 15 cm by 6 cm in area and about 2-3 cm thick, its sides curving slightly outwards. The characters were impressed on the prepared surface, and while still soft, with a stylus, the writing often standing in columns, and carried over upon the back and sides of the tablet. The clay was quite frequently moulded also into cones and barrel-shaped cylinders, having from six to ten sides on which writing could be inscribed.

In Babylonia, these tablets or cylinders were then dried in the sun. The Assyrians baked their tablets in a furnace making them even harder and more permanent, a process which rendered the writing practically indestructible, except by deliberate breakage. On the cost side, they had to be smaller to minimize the danger of them cracking in the kiln. Assyrian scribes therefore perfected the art of writing in a minute script that required the use of magnifying lenses for them to work and read their efforts. These lenses have been unearthed.

Unlike all other Semitic systems of writing (except the Ethiopic, which is an adaptation of the Greek), that of the Assyro-Babylonians generally runs from left to right in horizontal lines, although in some early inscriptions the lines run vertically from top to bottom like the Chinese. These two facts are evidence of the non-Semitic origin of the cuneiform system of writing.

## **The Puzzle of Pul**

The Assyrian king Pul, who received tribute from Menahem of Israel in 2 *Kings* 15:19-20, posed no special difficulty prior to the decipherment of the royal Assyrian annals. Among biblical commentators and historians of the ancient world writing before 1850, Pul was universally recognized as the first Assyrian conqueror to trouble Israel, followed immediately by Tiglath-pileser (III).

In 1852, Hincks read "Menahem of Samaria" as tributary to the king whose sculptures had been reused in the Southwest Palace of Nimrud. This decipherment permitted Layard a year later to publish an engraving of an Assyrian king on his chariot with the caption, "Bas-relief, representing Pul, or Tiglath-pileser" The identification, made before the cuneiform name of the king could actually be read, proved to be correct.

While the events enumerated in the translations of the badly mutilated inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III seemed to corroborate the military history of biblical Assyria, king Pul proved too entrenched in the scholarly imagination

for the first assyriologists *not* to find him in the monuments. Through a false reading of the royal Assyrian name Adad-nirari III as Phal-lukha, and by equating this with biblical Pul, Rawlinson absurdly linked the name Semiramis of Greek legend with Israelite history.

In cuneiform script, Tiglath-pileser's name usually required five or more different characters for its representation. The Assyrian name for Tiglath-pileser does not correspond to Pul, as even the most enthusiastic assyriological tyros were forced to admit. Publication of the Assyrian eponym canon, begun in 1862, failed to break the suspense. Pul could not be found in the Assyrian records. Numerous explanations were put forward to king Pul:

1. The Assyrian eponym canon is flawed—Pul was skipped in a forty-odd year hiatus.  
Oppert
2. The compiler of the Assyrian eponym canon was a blunderer.  
Hincks
3. Pul was a Chaldean suzerain whose reign was skipped by the Assyro-phile canon authors.  
Bosanquet
4. Pul is to be identified with an eighth century monarch preceding Tiglath-pileser whose name appears in the Assyrian eponym canon.  
Smith
5. Pul and Tiglath-pileser are identical.  
H C Rawlinson and Schrader

Schrader's identification in the 1870s of the scriptural and Ptolemaic canon entity Pul with the scriptural and cuneiform entity Tiglath-pileser III (known as Tiglath-pileser II at the time) wins almost universal acceptance. This identification was anticipated a decade earlier by H C Rawlinson. Unlike Schrader, Rawlinson never expressed his opinion about the positive correlation as an unqualified statement, waffling over the possibility that biblical Pul was a general of Tiglath-pileser. Schrader's lucid prose exposition, on the contrary, left no room for equivocation. The scholarly consensus from 1875 to the present, that Pul was another name by which the contemporaries of Tiglath-pileser knew him, may be correct, and biblical Assyria more or less equals historical Assyria. Since Pul corresponds to Tiglath-pileser, the historical integrity of the bible is perceived as intact, and the Assyrian eponym canon will be used henceforth by biblical pundits fearlessly, and recklessly, to date biblical and related historical events.

What would the exegetes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have done with Sargon, mentioned only once in *Isaiah* 20:1, had his name stubbornly refused to be read in the cuneiform inscriptions of Assyria. The initial failure of assyriology to confirm the reality of king Pul touched a nerve in bible-fearing Europe, sparking a twenty year hunt through textual and archaeological sources for the missing king. Schrader's solution, harmonizing biblical higher criticism and assyriological spadework was later canonized by William Foxwell Albright and his disciples as the American School "backgrounds method." The biblicists desperately want biblical exegesis to remain essentially static, and constantly feel assaulted by modernity.

## **Religion and Civilization**

The religion and civilization of Assyria derived from Babylonia and were almost identical with them. Assyrian architecture, art, science, and literature, temples and palaces were modelled upon those of Babylonia, although



built of stone rather than bricks. In sculptural decorations and in statuary more richness and originality were displayed by the Assyrians than by the Babylonians. It seems to have been a hobby of Assyrian monarchs to build colossal palaces, adorned with gigantic statues and an infinite variety of bas-reliefs and inscriptions showing their warlike exploits. Assurbanipal's library shows that Assyrian religious literature was identical to that of Babylonia. The Assyrians adopted Babylonian doctrines, cults and rites, making only the slightest modifications to make them suitable in the northern country. The chief difference was that the Assyrian principal god was Assur whereas in Babylonia it was Marduk. The principal deities—there are many minor ones—of both countries are:

1. The three chief deities
  - ☐ Anu, the god of the heavenly expanse
  - ☐ Bel, the earth god and creator of mankind
  - ☐ Ea, the god of humanity par excellence, and of the water
2. Ishtar, the mother of mankind and the consort of Bel
3. Sin, firstborn son of Bel, the father of wisdom personified in the moon
4. Shamash, the sun-god
5. Ninib (Ninurta), the hero of the heavenly and earthly spirits
6. Nergal, chief of the netherworld and of the subterranean demons, and god of pestilence and fevers
7. Marduk, originally a solar deity, conqueror of storms, and afterwards creator of mankind and the supreme god of Semitic Babylonia
8. Adad, or Rimmon, the god of storms, thunders, and lighting
9. Nebo, the god of wisdom, to whom the art of writing and sciences are ascribed
10. Girru-Nusku, or, simply, Nusku, the god of fire, as driving away demons and evil spirits
11. Assur, the consort of Belit, and the supreme god of Assyria.

The Assyro-Babylonian religion, civilization, and literature has exercised an immense and unsuspected influence upon the origin and development of the literature, and the religious and social institutions of the ancient Hebrews. Assyriology has not strikingly confirmed the strict veracity of the biblical narratives, or demonstrated the fallacies of higher criticism, as professor A L Sayce, and others once contended, but allows the Jewish scriptures to be studied in their correct historical background.

Simo Parpola (*Archaeology Odyssey* 1999) explains that the Assyrian king was a son of God, a model of human perfection, a sacred institution, and essential to the people's salvation. A common motif of Assyrian royal iconography—in architecture, on seals and weapons, and on jewelry—was a palm growing on a mountain. Earth was linked to heaven by a sacred tree. The palace of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC) in Kalhu (Calah, Nimrod) had over 400 images of the sacred tree. Directly behind the royal throne, the tree appeared under the winged solar disk of Ashur, the supreme god, and flanked by two images of the king. When seated on his throne, the king sat in the tree. Sumerian kings, about 2000 BC, were called "palm trees". In the Jewish scriptures, the king of Babylon dreamt of a tree growing in the middle of the earth, its top reaching the sky, and is told by the prophet:

That tree, O king, is you.

Daniel 4:10-22

Inanna or Ishtar, the divine mother of the king, planted the cosmic tree. The Assyrian Father-Mother-Son triad of Ashur, Ishtar and the king suggests the Christian Trinity, where the Son, according to Athanasius, is “the self same Godhead as the Father, but that Godhead manifested rather than immanent”.

Ninurta seems to be the judging summer sun that decides men’s fates. The Assyrian kings saw themselves as protectors of justice in this same way, and aimed to emulate Ninurta, who mythologically fought and defeated evil—any threat to the kingdom. He meets these forces in the “mountain” or the “foreign land”, defeats them and returns to the side of his father and mother, where he remains as the Judge. This heavenly myth justifying the earthly king reminds us of the Christian ascension of Christ to the right hand of his Father as the judge over the living and the dead. Ninurta also recalls the archangel Michael, the “Great Prince”, the slayer of the Dragon and the holder of the celestial keys, in Jewish apocalyptic and apocryphal traditions. Ninurta, as the king, was god in human form, the “perfect man”, god’s earthly regent. Parpola writes:

The sun is the primary symbol of the supreme god, Ashur. The blinding brilliance of its disk symbolized the absolute purity, holiness and righteousness of god as opposed to the darkness of the world, associated with evil, ignorance, injustice and death. The sun’s unwavering, absolutely straight path across the skies, its merciless heat and the triumphant return of light after the winter solstice symbolized god’s irresistible victory over wickedness and evil. Finally, the eternal return of the seasons symbolized the eternity of god and kingship as a divine institution eternally regenerating itself, notwithstanding the bodily death of the king.

The Assyrian king was the “sun” or the “very image of Shamash”, the sun god. The word “king” was written as 20, the sacred number of the sun god. A god could not reside in an unworthy body, so the king had to aim to be, or seem, perfect. A perfect king, filled with the divine spirit, would be just and keep cosmic harmony, bringing his people divine blessings, prosperity and peace. An imperfect king ruled without the divine spirit, and so unjustly, disrupting cosmic harmony, drawing down divine wrath and causing the people miseries, calamities and war.

Colossal supernatural beings in the shape of a bull, lion, eagle and man, symbolizing the four points of the Zodiac—called “*cherubim*” by the Jews—guarded the gates of the royal palace. These are the four guardians of the divine throne in *Ezekiel* 1:10 and *Revelation* 4:76, and symbolize the four Christian evangelists, Matthew (man), Mark (lion), Luke (bull) and John (eagle). Priests with buckets of holy water purified everyone who entered the palace, and others filled the air with purifying incense. The king’s attendants and guards were eunuchs whose asexuality matched that of the angels.

The king ruled through a state council composed of eight cabinet ministers, “the assembly of men of renown”. To reach perfection in decision making and to eliminate human error, the king made no important decision without consulting his cabinet, but he took responsibility for whatever was decided, and all resolutions of the council were issued in his name alone.

The will of the gods was checked by extispicy—examining the entrails of animals—before any important decision was enforced. The king had teams of these augurs and astrologers to advise him. The gods communicated their pleasure or displeasure through signs transmitted in dreams, portents and oracles. Apart from reading the signs sent by the gods, the royal scholars protected the king against disease, demons, and

witchcraft, so the meaning of these signs became a great school of scholarship. Before the seventh century BC, omen texts had been collected by scribes in handbooks. A collection could take up many tablets and was named from the first words of the first tablet just like the Jewish names of the books of scripture.

Any sign of divine displeasure required immediate action. The royal archive of Nineveh, excavated in the nineteenth century, contained correspondence from priests and scribes, addressed to the Assyrian kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, about the observation and interpretation of omens, and the interpretation and rituals needed to ward off harm.

Twice or thrice we watched for Mars today but we did not see it. It has set. Maybe the king my lord will say as follows: "Is there any ominous sign in the fact that it set?" I answer: "There is not."

From Issar-Shumu-Eresh

If in Kislimu from the first day to the thirtieth day Venus disappears in the east: there will be a famine of barley and straw in the land. If the moon becomes visible on the thirtieth day: there will be frost, variant: rumour of the enemy. If the moon becomes visible in Sabatu on the thirtieth day: an eclipse of all lands will take place.

From the Chief Scribe

It was a precarious profession, however, if the astrologer did not impress the king:

May the king of the world, my lord, not abandon me! Every day I approach the king because of my hunger, and now he assigned me to making bricks, saying "Make bricks!" May the king my lord not abandon me so that I do not have to die!

From Tabiya

Sometimes an omen required an apotropaic ritual and a substitute king had to be chosen, who would take upon himself the curse on the king and the land, and die in his stead. But meanwhile the king had to prove his redemption by special ritual acts that were exacting. Blamelessly executing the daily ritual acts of kingship fulfilled the king's main duty to maintain divine order—the kingdom itself.

To appoint a successor, the king consulted the divine will through his augurs and, if favourable, appointed the son who displayed the greatest abilities in his education as crown prince. On an auspicious day the prince was introduced into the royal palace and presented with the royal diadem. From now on the prince was a prince regent, equal in essence to his father, fit to exercise kingship and assume royal power should his father die.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the story of the legendary king of Uruk who sought eternal life, is the path of the king to spiritual perfection. Each of its twelve tablets deals with a particular god of the Assyrian pantheon in the order in which they appear in the Assyrian sacred tree, starting from Nergal, the god of the underworld and sexual power at its root. At the end of the quest, Gilgamesh meets his dead friend, Enkidu, and learns about life after death. In tablet six, Gilgamesh kills the Bull of Heaven, like Mithras. He is made divine and appointed as Judge of the dead, like Jesus:

Gilgamesh, perfect king, judge of the Anunnaki, administrator of the netherworld, lord of the dwellers-

below, you are a judge and have vision like God. You stand in the netherworld and pronounce final judgment. Your judgment is not altered, your word is not despised. You question, you inquire, you judge, you weigh, and you render the correct decision. Shamash has entrusted verdict and decision in your hands. In your presence kings, regents and princes bow down.

When Assyria fell, scholars who had served the Assyrian emperor were employed with the Median and neo-Babylonian kings, so the Assyrian tradition continued through the neo-Babylonian empire and into the Persian period. The Persians continued Assyrian culture.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?**  
**History of Assyria**

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### **To Tiglath-Pileser I**

The origin of Assyria is obscure. Iranian people had power between the rivers for long periods. The Gutians, the Quti, and the Lullubu in succession ruled in Akkad after its empire fell. The Kassites came into the northern edges of Babylonia about 1700 BC and eventually took over the whole country and ruled it for 600 years. From 900 BC, Aramaeans began to make up a substantial proportion of the population of Babylon. Even after the Kassites had thoroughly assimilated into the Babylonians, the Iranian tribe remained on the Plateau, and Assyrians mention them as late as the seventh century.

In the light of the putative origins of Israel, von Soden says that “tribes” and “nations” are both words that scarcely apply to the ancient near east. By the start of recorded history, the people of the region, except for desert Bedouins, and the Indo-European tribes entering from the east had already passed the tribal phase of society. On the other hand, mainly nothing existed like the modern nation states. In most of the period, the political entity was the city state, anything approximating to nation states barely appearing much before classical times. Only the large empires achieved nationhood before the end of this period.

The author of *Genesis* 10 says the Assyrians are the descendants of Assur, one of the sons of Sem (Shem, *Gen* 10:22).

...began Nimrod. He began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before Yehouah, wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before Yehouah. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Assur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, And Resen between Nineveh and Calah, the same is a great city.

*Gen* 10:8-12

Shem mythologically will refer to Shamash, the sun god, showing that Assur is a son of the sun god and would have had solar attributes himself. Nimrod here in the bible is Ninurta, the Babylonian god of the hunt. Mythologically, this passage was interpreted as that Assur left Babylonia, where Nimrod the terrible was reigning, and settled in Assyria, where he built the cities of Nineveh, Rehoboth, Calah, and Resen. Now, the interpretation is that Nimrod himself, the beginning of whose kingdom was Babylon (Babel), Erech, Accad, and Calneh in Southern Babylonia went up to Assyria, Assur here meaning Assyria, not the god, Assur, and there he built the four cities and founded Assyria. Either interpretation says that the Assyrians were a Babylonian colony.

Early Assyrian rulers had the title of Ishshaku, governor, and seemed subject to some outside power, presumably Babylonia. Some of the earliest of these Ishshaki known to us are Shamshi-Adad I (or Shamshi-Rimmon, 1813-1781 BC) and his son Ishmi-Dagan (1781-1741 BC). The apparent cruelty of the Assyrians in their exaggerated death tolls of defeated enemies and their cruel illustrations of their victories hides a rarely

expressed humanity, Von Soden says. The publication of their supposed excesses was deliberate propaganda to induce their enemies to yield the more readily, but even as early as this Ishshaku, Shamshi-Adad I, the king instructed his son, Ishme-Dagan, to treat conquered people such that they would readily recognize the king without force. The next step from this is to claim, in the victory propaganda, that the aim was not to harm the people but to save them! This is what these rulers eventually did.

The two cities of Nineveh and Assur were certainly in existence at the time of Hammurabi (1792-1740 BC) for in one of his letters he mentions them. In a long inscription (300 lines), Agumkakrime, one of the Kassitic rulers of Babylonia (c 1700 BC), enumerated the countries he ruled, but did not mention Assyria. So, an independent Assyrian kingdom seemed to emerge towards the seventeenth century BC. An inscription of Esarhaddon (680-669 BC), written in archaic Babylonian, says the first Assyrian Ishshaku to assume the title of king was Belu-bani (now dated 1698-1689 BC).

Towards the fifteenth century BC, Egyptian supremacy extended over Syria and the Mesopotamian valley. In one of the royal inscriptions of Thutmose III of Egypt (1504-1450 BC), Assyria is among his tributary nations. From the Tel-el-Amarna letters, diplomatic negotiations and correspondences were frequent among the rulers of Assyria, Babylonia, Syria, Mitanni, and the Egyptian Pharaohs, especially Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten, 1350-1334 BC).

In this period, the kings of Assyria are equal with those of Babylonia, and successfully contesting with the latter for the boundaries of their kingdom. Puzur-Assur III (1519-1496 BC) settled the boundary-lines of his kingdom with his contemporary Burnaburiash I, a Kassite king of Babylon. The same treaty was also settled between Assur-bel-nisheshu (1417-1409 BC) and Karaindash of Babylonia. Assur-nadin-ahhe (1400-1391 BC) is mentioned by Assur-uballit (1363-1328 BC), in one of his letters to Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten, 1350-1334 BC), king of Egypt, as his father and predecessor, but he was actually the son of Eriba-adad (1390-1364 BC) who was the son of Assur-bel-nisheshu, not Assur-nadin-ahhe. The uncle of Assur-bel-nisheshu who also reigned in Assyria only twenty years before was also called Assur-nadin-ahhe (c 1450-1431). The relationships of these kings is obviously not properly understood, and probably the political situation in Assyria also.

Enlil-nirari (1327-1318 BC), Assur-uballit's successor on the throne of Assyria, made war against Kurigalzu II (1332-1308 BC) of Babylon and defeated him at the city of Sugagu, annexing the northern part of Babylonia to Assyria. Enlil-nirari was succeeded by his son, Arik-den-ilu (1317-1306 BC), who undertook several successful military expeditions to the east and southeast of Assyria and built various temples, and of whom few, but important, inscriptions remain. His successor was Adad-nirari I (1305-1274 BC), who not only strengthened the newly-conquered territories of his two predecessors, but also made war and defeated Nazi-Maruttash (1307-1282 BC), king of Babylonia, the successor of Kurigalzu II, adding a considerable Babylonian territory to the infant but precocious Assyrian Empire.

About this time, the Egyptian supremacy over Syria and Mesopotamia was cut by the brilliant military raids and resistance of the Hittites, a powerful horde of tribes in Northern Syria and Asia Minor. In the revival of Assyria after the expulsion of the Mitannian kings, Shalmaneser I (1273-1244 BC), an ambitious and energetic monarch, succeeded and extended Assyrian power westwards. Following the course of the Tigris, Shalmaneser I marched northwards and subjugated many northern tribes, then, turning westwards, invaded part of northeastern Syria and conquered the Arami, or Aramaeans, of Western Mesopotamia (Syria). From there he



marched against the land of Musri, in Northern Arabia, adding a considerable territory to his empire. For strategic reasons he transferred his capital from Assur to Kalkhi (Calah, of *Genesis*) forty miles to the north, on the eastern bank of the Tigris, and eighteen miles south of Nineveh.

Shalmaneser I was succeeded by his son Tukulti-Ninurta (1243-1207 BC). Shalmaneser I had organised the first large scale deportations, and Tukulti-Ninurta continued the policy. He was a valiant warrior and conqueror, for he not only preserved the integrity of the empire but also extended it towards the north and northwest. He invaded and conquered Babylonia, where he established his government for seven years, during which he became obnoxious to the Babylonians, who plotted and rebelled against him, proclaiming a certain Adad-shumi-usur (1216-1187 BC) king in his stead. The Assyrians themselves also became dissatisfied on account of his long absence from Assyria, and he was slain by his own nobles, who proclaimed his son, Assur-nadin-apli (1206-1203 BC), king in his stead. This king died soon and Assur-ninari III (1202-1197 BC) followed.

Enlil-kudurri-usur (1196-1192 BC), a son of Tukulti-Ninurta, and Ninurta-apil-ekur (1191-1179 BC), a descendant of Eriba-Adad, then reigned over Assyria. They were attacked and defeated by the Babylonians who regained possession of a much of their lost territory. The next Assyrian monarch was Assur-dan I (1178-1133 BC), Ninurta-apil-ekur's son. He avenged his father's defeat by invading Babylonia and capturing the cities of Zaban and Akarsallu. Two of his sons also reigned in the time allotted to him, but why and the details are uncertain. Perhaps there was a civil war or the country was divided, but, if so, Babylonia was unable to take advantage, the Kassite dynasty just coming to an end.

One of Assur-dan's sons was Mutakkil-Nusku, and his son, Assur-resb-ishi I (1132-1115 BC), succeeded to the throne and he subjugated the peoples of Ahlami, Lullumi, Kuti (or Guti, probably the Kurds) and imposed a crushing defeat on his rival and contemporary, Nebuchadrezzar I (1125-1104 BC), king of Babylonia (not the biblical Nebuchadrezzar, who was number II).

Assur-resb-ishi was succeeded by his son, Tiglath-pileser I (1114-1076 BC), one of the greatest Assyrian monarchs, under whose reign Assyria rose to the apex of its military success and glory. He has left us a detailed and circumstantial account of his military achievements, written on four octagonal cylinders which he placed at the four corners of the temple built by him to the god Adad. According to these, in the first five years of his reign, he undertook several successful military expeditions against Mushku, against the Shubari, against the Hittites, and into the mountains of Zagros, against the people of Nairi and twenty-three kings, who were chased by him as far north as Lake Van in Armenia, against the people of Musri in Northern Arabia, and against the Aramaens, or Syrians.

In all, forty-two countries and their kings, from beyond the Lower Zab, from the border of the distant mountains as far as the farther side of the Euphrates, up to the land of Hatti [Hittites] and as far as the upper sea of the setting sun [Lake Van], from the beginning of my sovereignty until my fifth year, has my hand conquered. I carried away their possessions, burned their cities with fire, demanded from their hostages tribute and contributions, and laid on them the heavy yoke of my rule.

He crossed the Euphrates several times, and even reached the Mediterranean, upon the waters of which he embarked. He also invaded Babylonia, inflicting a heavy blow on the Babylonian king, Marduk-nadin-ahhe (1099-1082 BC) and his army, and capturing several important cities, such as Dur-Kurigalzu, Sippar, Babylon,

and Opis. He pushed his triumphal march even as far as Elam.

Tiglath-pileser I was also a daring hunter, for in one of his campaigns, he tells us, he killed no fewer than one hundred and twenty lions on foot, and eight hundred with spears while in his chariot, caught elephants alive, and killed ten in his chariot. He kept at the city of Assur a park of animals suitable for the chase. At Nineveh, he had a botanical garden, in which he planted specimens of foreign trees gathered during his campaigns. He built also many temples, palaces, and canals. At the time of Tiglath-pileser's death, Assyria was enjoying a period of tranquillity, which did not last long, for his two sons and successors, Assur-bel-kala (1073-1056 BC) and Shamshi-Adad IV (1053-1050 BC), sought alliances with the kings of Babylonia.

From about 1070 to 950 BC the history of Assyria is vague, but from then to the fall of Nineveh and the overthrow of the Assyrian Empire (606 BC) the history of Assyria is well documented. A pair of monarchs succeed each other with the same names as an earlier pair, Assur-resh-ishi (971-967 BC) and his son Tiglath-pileser II (966-935 BC). Then Assur-dan II (934-912 BC) succeeded, and the latter's son, Adad-nirari II (911-891 BC), his son, Tukulti-Ninurta II (890-884 BC). Curiously, from 1012 BC when Assur-rabi II (1012-972 BC) came to the throne until 859 when Assur-nasir-pal (883-859 BC) was succeeded by his son Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC), every monarch was a second (II). It is only towards the end of this period that the eponym system can be considered reliable, and yet scholars do not seem to consider that any of these monarchs might be being counted twice, perhaps through the attempt of some king to show an extended history for the country, or because at times Assyria has been a divided country. In Egypt, it might be called an "intermediate period."

Adad-nirari and Tukulti-Ninurta appear to have undertaken several successful expeditions against Babylonia and the regions north of Assyria. Tukulti-Ninurta's successor was his son Assur-nasir-pal, with whose accession to the throne began a long career of victory that placed Assyria at the head of the great powers of that age. From now on, the eponyms seem to be accurate, and so too is Assyrian dating.

Assur-nasir-pal was a great conqueror, soldier, organizer, hunter, and builder, but fierce and cruel. In his eleven military campaigns he invaded, subdued, and conquered, after a series of devastations and raids, all the regions north, south, east, and west of Assyria, from the mountains of Armenia down to Babylon, and from the mountains of Kurdistan and Lake Urmi (Urum-yah, biblicists note!) to the Mediterranean. He crossed the Euphrates and the Orontes, penetrated into the Lebanon region, attacked Carchemish, the capital of the southern Hittites, invaded Syria, and compelled the cities of the Mediterranean coast (such as Tyre, Sidon, Bylos, and Arvad) to pay tribute.

In the reign of Assur-nasir-pal, Assyria might have first come into touch with the small Aramaean country called in the bible Israel. In 878 BC, Omri (885-874 BC) was king of Israel. Assur-nasir-pal, in his expedition against Carchemish and Syria, which took place in 878 BC, must have exacted tribute from Khumri (Omri), although the latter's name is not explicitly mentioned either in Assur-nasir-pal's inscriptions, or in the *Old Testament*, in this connexion. Yet, all later Assyrian incursions down to the time of Sargon, for nearly 150 years, Israel is called the "house of Khumri." Jehu, a later king of Israel, but not of the dynasty of Omri, according to the scriptures, is called the "son of Khumri." The other possibility is that Omri was set up as a puppet ruler by Assur-nasir-pal as a buffer against Egypt. Omri is not a Hebrew name.

Assur-nasir-pal was succeeded by his son, Shalmaneser III, who in the sixth year of his reign (852 BC) made

an expedition to the west to subdue Damascus, one of the stronger Aramaean states. King Ahab of Israel was one of the allies of Benhadad, king of Damascus. In describing this expedition on the Kurkh stele, the Assyrian monarch goes on to say that he approached Karkar, a town to the southwest of Carchemish, and the royal residence of king Irkhuleni of Hamath, yet another small Aramaean state.

I desolated and destroyed, I burnt it: 1200 chariots, 1200 horsemen, 20,000 men of Benidri of Damascus, 700 chariots, 700 horsemen, 10,000 men of Irkhuleni of Hamath, 2,000 chariots, 10,000 men of Ahab of Israel (A-kha-ab-bu matu Sir-'la-ai)... these twelve kings he took to his assistance. To offer battle they marched against me. With the noble might which Assur, the Lord, granted, with the powerful weapons which Nergal, who walks before me, gave, I fought with them, from Karkar into Gilzan I smote them. Of their soldiers I slew 14,000.

The Jewish scriptures are silent on the presence of Ahab in the battle of Karkar, which took place in the same year in which Ahab died fighting in the battle of Ramoth Galaad (*1 Kings 22*).

Eleven years after this event Jehu (841-814 BC) was proclaimed king over Israel, and one of his first acts was to pay tribute to Shalmaneser III. This incident is commemorated in the latter's well-known "black obelisk," in the British Museum, in which Jehu himself, "the son of Khumri," is sculptured as paying tribute to the king. In another inscription, the same king records the same fact, saying:

At that time I received the tribute of the Tyrians, Sidonians, and Jehu the son of Omri.

This act of homage took place in 840 BC, in the eighteenth year of Shalmaneser's reign.

After Shalmaneser II came his son Shamshi-Adad V (823-811 BC), who undertook four campaigns to quell the rebellion caused by his elder son, Assur-danin-pal. He also fought and defeated the Babylonian king, Marduk-balassu-iqbi (c 813 BC) and his powerful army.

His successor, Adad-nirari III (810-783 BC), undertook several expeditions against Media, Armenia, the land of Nairi (Urartu, biblical Ararat), and the region around Lake Urmi, and subjugated all the coastlands of the West, including Tyre, Sidon, Edom, Philistia and "bit Khumri," the "house (land) of Omri." The chief object of this expedition was again to subdue Damascus which he did by compelling Mari, its king, to pay a heavy tribute in silver, gold, copper, and iron, besides quantities of cloth and furniture. Jehoahaz (813-797 BC) was then king over Israel, and he welcomed Adad-nirari's advance, because his conquest of Damascus relieved Israel from the yoke of the Syrians. Adad-nirari III also claimed sovereignty over Babylonia.

In one of his inscriptions, which are unfortunately scarce and laconic, he mentions the name of his wife, Sammuramat, which is the only Assyrian or Babylonian name discovered so far having any phonetic resemblance to that of the famous legendary queen, Semiramis. This was Rawlinson's assumption, but the personal identity of the two queens is not admissible.

Adad-nirari III was succeeded by Shalmaneser III (783-773 BC), and the latter by Assur-dan III (773-755 BC). No adequate inscriptions of their reigns have been found but the Assyrian hold on regions west of the Euphrates was abandoned in the reigns of these kings.

## Pul, Samaria and Judah

Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC), the biblical Pul, seized the throne of Assyria, at Nineveh. In the Assyrian inscriptions his name occurs only as Tiglath-pileser, but in the Babylonian *List of Kings* he is called Pu-lu, which settles his identity with the Phul, or Pul of the bible.

He is said to have begun life as gardener, to have distinguished himself as a soldier, and to have been elevated to the throne by the army. He was a most capable monarch, enterprising, energetic, wise, and daring. His military ability saved the Assyrian Empire from the utter ruin and decay which had begun to threaten its existence, and he is aptly spoken of as the founder of the Second Assyrian Empire.

Tiglath-pileser's methods differed markedly from those of his predecessors. They had been robber barons—mere raiders and plunderers. Tiglath-pileser III was an administrator and economist as well as a soldier. He organized the empire and divided it into provinces, each of which had to pay a fixed tribute to the exchequer. He was thus able to extend Assyrian supremacy over almost all of Western Asia, from Armenia to Egypt, and from Persia to the Mediterranean, on a sound economic footing. Tiglath-pileser was the Assyrian monarch to begin on a large scale the system of transplanting peoples from one country to another, with the object of breaking down their national spirit, unity, and independence.

The biblical importance of Tiglath-pileser is that he ended the independence of Samaria, the biblical Israel, a fact confirmed by *2 Kings* 25:19-20, and was the first Assyrian king to mention the kingdom of Judah. Two inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III confirm these facts. They contain the names of the western kings who gave tribute to the king of Assyria and include the name of Menahem “of Samaria” (753-742 BC). The passage *2 Kings* 15:19-20, depicts the arrival of the Assyrian king in Israel and the offerings of Menahem, but the Assyrian sources do not relate any arrival of Tiglath-pileser III in Israel in the time of Menahem. Menahem goes to Assyria.

In a stele from Iran, Menahem is mentioned before Ethbaal, king of Tyre, whereas in the other inscription Menahem is mentioned before Hiram, king of Tyre. The Iranian stele seems to pertain to events before 738 BC but Hiram, king of Tyre, is specifically mentioned in connexion with Rezin's revolt and Tiglath-pileser III's campaigns to the west in 734-732 BC:

[Hi]ram of Tyre, who plotted together with Rezin...

Ethbaal must have preceded Hiram and since Matan reigned after Hiram, the Tyrian kings are in the order Ethbaal, Hiram, and Matan, and Menahem must have paid tribute first around 740 BC. Following the fall of Arpad in 740 BC, most western kingdoms, including Samaria, surrendered to Assyria. Menahem probably still reigned but over a divided Samaria in which Pekahiah, and Pekah were his rivals. There might also have been another.

Towards the end of Tiglath-pileser's reign, Ahaz (730-715 BC) became king of Judah. In the bible, this prince, having been hard pressed and harassed by Rezin of Damascus, and Pekah of Israel, entreated protection from Tiglath-pileser, who marched westward and attacked Rezin, whom he shut up in Damascus. Two years later,

the city surrendered. Rezin was slain, and the inhabitants were carried away captives (2 Kgs 26:7-9). After the fall of Damascus, Tiglath-pileser held a durbar which was attended by loyal princes amongst whom was Ahaz himself. He was a loyal soldier in Pul's armies.

Samaria was also overrun by the Assyrian monarch, and the country heavily taxed. At the same time the Philistines, the Edomites and the Arabians were subdued, and the trans-Jordanic tribes carried into captivity. In 733 BC, the Assyrian monarch carried off the population from large portions of the kingdom of Israel, sparing, however, the capital, Samaria. The truth is that Ahaz was either a dissident Judahite of Samaria encouraged by Tiglath-pileser to secede from Samaria, or was simply rewarded with the part of Samaria called Judah for his loyalty when Samaria folded. Either way Judah was the rump of Samaria.

The story from the bible is not at all clear. Gershom Galil in *Biblica* 81 (2000) has tried to clarify the events preceding the fall of Samaria. They begin with the king of Arpad and Unqi being accused by Tiglath-pileser III of violating an oath and revolting against Assyria.

The kingdom of Urartu had been increasing its influence in the region, notably Kummukh, Carchemish and the Aleppo area. Tiglath-pileser had become concerned about it. In 743-742 BC, the Assyrians defeated a coalition headed by Sarduri II, king of Urartu and Mati'il, king of Arpad and including the kings of Melid, Gurgum and Kummukh. The Assyrians besieged the city of Arpad following the victory in a battle fought in the land of Kummukh. The city fell after three years and the kingdom of Arpad became an Assyrian province.

Following the conquest of Arpad in 740 BC and the offerings made by western kings, the Assyrian army headed towards the upper Tigris and fought against Ullubu (739-738 BC). The Assyrians returned to the west in 738-737 BC and defeated the coalition led by Azriyau and Tutamu, king of Unqi.

Azriyau's identity has not yet been settled. Biblicists say he was Uzziah (Azariah), king of Judah, but this is unlikely. No external evidence of Uzziah exists but the biblical Uzziah must have been an old man (66) in 738 BC, and there is no suggestion of a link with the revolt in northern Syria against Assyria. Judah cannot have taken control of Israel, so Israel did not make an alliance with Assyria and Egypt to cast off the yoke of Judah. Azriyau might have led the coalition from the Aramaean state of Yaudi in the north, not Judah. Eni-il king of Hamath is mentioned in the list of tribute of 738 BC. From it, it seems that amongst the kingdoms that acted against Assyria in 736 BC, only Hamath remained independent.

Several scholars assume that unlike Azriyau and his allies, Hamath did not revolt against Assyria. Hamath was not mentioned in the stele from Iran, so Hamath apparently did not surrender to Assyria in 740 BC. Moreover, if Hamath was loyal to Assyria in 738 BC and did not participate in Azriyau's coalition, and actually suffered from his actions, which resulted in the subjugation of its cities, why was Hamath punished by the Assyrians, who seized nineteen of its districts? Assyria should have rewarded the loyalty of Hamath's king for resisting the revolt, not have annexed territories from his kingdom.

Perhaps Azriyau was the king of Hamath. Galil makes this assumption and immediately thinks his name suggests Israelite influence over Hamath in the mid-eighth century BC, citing a study by S Dalley. The overriding false assumption of all biblicists is that Yehouah was the god only of Israel and Judah. For them, any name in "Yah," "Yeho," or "Yau" shows the person to have been a Jew. In the sense that anyone who worships

Yehouah is a Jew, they are right, but they insist that “Jew” signifies a nation not a religion. Yehouah was a Canaanite god, so Canaanites in the north of the Levant could have theophoric names in Yehouah. It would therefore be equally correct, if not more so, to speak of the influence of Hamath on Israel.

Azriyau, if he were a usurper king of Hamath, died in battle or was deposed in a palace revolution, and Eni-il was crowned in his stead. The assumed palace revolution in Hamath and the emergence of a pro-Assyrian group, for Galil, explains why Assyria agreed to the continuation of the partially independent existence of Hamath's kingdom, while narrowing its territorial extent—it compares with the Israel of Hoshea. Kraeling, however, thought Azriyau was a usurper in Yaudi and forged an alliance which included anti-Assyrian elements in Hamath. The nineteen districts that allied with the Yaudi rebel were the ones which eventually were annexed, leaving a rump of a country. This is indeed similar to what happened in Samaria, only the district of Judah being loyal to Assyria and therefore left as a rump under Ahaz.

The king of Arvad is not listed among the kings offering tribute to Assyria in 738 BC, so Arvad had not yielded, even after the defeat of the kings of Unqi and the Phoenician kingdoms to the north of Byblos. The Assyrians defeated Arvad apparently during their campaign of 734 BC, as is evident from the list of offerings to Assyria in 734 BC.

In the bible, Aram and Israel attacked Jerusalem during the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah, and wished to crown a king of their choice over Judah. Ahaz sent to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria (2 Kgs 16:7-8) for help. The king of Assyria accepted Ahaz's appeal and attacked Aram, conquered Damascus, and killed Rezin. The time when Assyria subjugated Judah cannot clearly be learned from these passages, whether before or after the request of Ahaz.

Ahaz is specifically mentioned in a summary inscription from Calah. Jehoahaz (Ya-u-ha-zi) of Judah and the kings of Amon, Moab, Edom and Philistia are mentioned among those who conveyed offerings to Assyria. This inscription was written following the seventh year of Tiglath-pileser III, about 736 BC. The events are described in geographical order, not chronologically.

1. The reduction of the Arabs and other nomads, and the appointment of Idibi'ilu.
2. An updated list of kings paying tribute to Assyria during 738 BC which omits the names of several kings, among them are those of Aram and Israel.
3. A list of kings of Phoenicia, Philistia, Judah, and Transjordan included amongst the earlier list but now included.
4. Two additional events are annexed—the payment of tribute by Matan (Metenna) of Tyre and the deposing of Uassurme king of Tabal. Earlier the latter is included in the same inscription among the givers of tribute, showing that this is later.

Panammu, king of Samal, is mentioned but he was killed fighting for the Assyrians during the siege of Damascus in 733-732 BC. [Mi]jtinti of Ashkelon was deposed apparently in 732 BC. So the date of the seventh year of Pul must be after 738 BC but before 734 BC. 736 BC seems right.

Determining the order of Tiglath-pileser III's campaigns during 734-732 BC is difficult because the Assyrian inscriptions are mostly “summary inscriptions” which are imprecise and sometimes contradictory, and the few



annals passages that have survived provide little help, and the biblical data are also unclear. The purpose of the campaign to the Mediterranean coast in 734 BC was probably punitive, and economic—the desire of Tiglath-pileser to take and tax the rich coastal cities. The main stages of the 734 campaign might have been:

1. The subjugation of Arvad and the annexation of Kashpuna to the province of Sumur.
2. The conquest of the cities of Tyre, including Mahalab.
3. Moving the Assyrian army south down the coast towards Philistia.
4. The subjugation of Gaza.
5. The erection of a monument in “the city of the brook of Egypt.”
6. The subjugation of Siruatti the Me'nite.

Judah, Ashkelon and other pro-Assyrian cities willingly surrendered to the Assyrians, who returned to their homeland when the campaign ended in 734 BC. Once the Assyrian armies had departed from the area, Aram and Israel attacked Judah. Hanun of Gaza, Hiram of Tyre, Shamshi queen of the Arabs and others joined the alliance, which was supported by Egypt. Judah was the first target because it had seceded from Samaria, and therefore from the alliance to favour Assyria. Ahaz was loyal to Tiglath-pileser and asked for him to intervene in the conflict. Tiglath-pileser, who was in Urartu, lifted the siege on Tushpa, and directed his forces again to the west to punish the coalition.

The 733-732 BC campaign was mainly aimed against Aram and Israel. The precise details of the campaign are a guess. At the beginning, regions in the kingdom of Aram were conquered and Damascus besieged. The war against Shamshi queen of the Arabs was launched following the invasion of the kingdom of Damascus in 733 BC. Shamshi was probably crowned in 737 BC or 736 BC and carried on the former policy. The Arabs gave tribute to Assyria in 740-735 BC, whereas in 734 BC the Arabs joined the allies. The surrender of the Arabs was closely followed by that of the Massa, Tema, Ephah and other nomad tribes. In the bible, Transjordan was also conquered during this campaign and the exiles from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh were deported to Assyria (2 Kgs 15:29; 1 Chr 5:6; 22:25-26).

The subjugation of the kingdoms of Israel and Aram was completed only in 732 BC. The Assyrian army conquered Galilee (2 Kgs 15:26) and besieged Samaria. Only the reduction of cities located in upper and lower Galilee are mentioned in the biblical and Assyrian sources, yet all Israelite cities apart from Samaria are said to have been razed.

The siege of Damascus was completed apparently in 732 BC. Rezin was killed and the kingdom of Aram was annexed to Assyria and divided into four provinces (2 Kgs 16:9). Samaria and Ashkelon also surrendered due to the fall of Damascus. Palace revolutions occurred in both cities. Mitinti was deposed by Rukibtu, whereas Hoshea, who killed Pekah, seized power over Israel (2 Kgs 15:30). Hoshea was crowned in 732-731 BC. An Assyrian inscription which indicates that Hoshea gave tribute to the king of Assyria in Sarabanu.

### **Shalmaneser, Sargon and the Fall of Samaria**

Tiglath-pileser III was succeeded by his son, Shalmaneser V, who reigned five years (727-722 BC). No historical inscriptions relating to this king have as yet been found. Nevertheless, the *Babylonian Chronicle* (which gives a list of the principal events occurring in Babylonia and Assyria between 744 and 688 BC)

has the following statement:

On the 25th of Thebet [December-January] Shalmaneser ascended the throne of Assyria, and the city of Shamara'in (Samaria) was destroyed. In the fifth year of his reign he died in the month of Thebet.

The Assyrian *Eponym Canon* also informs us that the first two years of Shalmaneser's reign passed without an expedition, but in the remaining three his armies were engaged. The *Babylonian Chronicle* and the Jewish scriptures (2 Kgs 28) explicitly point to Palestine, and particularly to Samaria, the capital of the Israelitish kingdom. In the second or third year of Shalmaneser's reign, Osee (Hoshea) king of Israel, together with the king of Tyre, rebelled against Assyria, and to crush the rebellion the Assyrian monarch marched against both kings and laid siege to their capitals. The biblical account of this expedition is:

Against him came up Salmanasar king of the Assyrians, and Osee became his servant, and paid him tribute. And when the king of the Assyrians found that Osee endeavouring to rebel had sent messengers to Sua the king of Egypt, that he might not pay tribute to the king of the Assyrians, as he had done every year, he besieged him, bound him and cast him into prison. And he went through all the land: and going up to Samaria, he besieged it three years. And in the ninth year of Osee, the king of the Assyrians took Samaria, and carried Israel away to Assyria, and he placed them in Hala and Habor by the river of Gozan, in the cities of the Medes.

See also the parallel account in 2 Kings 18:9-11. This is evidence that the passage was written in the Persian period, because only then were these places which are in Mesopotamia, part of Persia (usually called Medes). The two biblical accounts, however, leave undecided the question, whether Shalmaneser himself or his successor conquered Samaria. From the Assyrian inscriptions, Shalmaneser died, or was murdered, before he could personally carry his victory to an end. He was succeeded by Sargon II.

Sargon, a man of commanding ability, was a usurper, despite his claim to royal ancestry. He is one of the greatest figures in Assyrian history, and the founder of the famous Sargonid dynasty, which held sway in Assyria for more than a century, until the fall of Nineveh and the overthrow of the Assyrian Empire. He himself reigned for seventeen years (722-705 BC) and proved a most successful warrior and organizer. In every battle he was victor, and in every difficulty a man of resource. He was also a great builder and patron of the arts. His greatest work was the building of Dur-Sharrukin, or the Castle of Sargon, the modern Khorsabad. It was a large city, situated about ten miles from Nineveh, with a population of 80,000. His palace there was a wonder of architecture, panelled in alabaster, adorned with sculpture, and inscribed with the records of his exploits.

In the same year in which he ascended the throne, Samaria fell (722 BC), and the kingdom of Israel was brought to an end.

In the beginning of my reign and in the first year of my reign ... Samaria, I besieged and conquered... 27,290 inhabitants I carried off... I restored it again and made it as before. People from all lands, my prisoners, I settled there. My officials I set over them as governors. Tribute and tax I laid on them, as on the Assyrians.

In other words the country was annexed to Assyria. Sargon's second campaign was against the Elamites, whom

he subdued. From Elam he marched westward, laid Hamath in ruins, and afterwards utterly defeated the combined forces of the Philistines and the Egyptians, at Raphia. He made Hanum, king of Gaza, prisoner, and carried several thousand captives, with rich booty, into Assyria. Two years later, he attacked Carchemish, the capital of the Hittites, and conquered it, capturing its king, officers, and treasures, and deporting them into Assyria. He then for fully six years harassed, and finally subdued, all the northern and northwestern tribes of Kurdistan, of Armenia (Urartu, or Ararat), and of Cilicia (Turkey)—the Mannai, the Mushki, the Kummukhi, the Milidi, the Kammani, the Gamgumi, the Samali, and many others who lived in those inaccessible regions. He subdued several Arabian tribes and then the Medians with their forty-two chiefs, or princes.

During the first eleven years of Sargon's reign, the kingdom of Judah remained peacefully subject to Assyria, paying the stipulated annual tribute. In 711 BC, Hezekiah (714-686 BC), king of Judah, partly influenced by Merodach-baladan II (Marduk-apal-idinna, 721-710;703 BC) of Babylonia, and partly by promises of help from Egypt, rebelled against the Assyrian monarch, and in this revolt he was heartily joined by the allies—the Phoenicians, the Philistines, the Moabites, and the Ammonites. Sargon, ever quick to act, collected a powerful army, marched against the rebels, and dealt them a crushing blow. The fact is recorded in *Isaiah* 20:1, where the name of Sargon is expressly mentioned as that of the invader and conqueror.

With Palestine and the West pacified and subdued Sargon, energetic and prompt, turned his attention to Babylonia, where Merodach-baladan, one of the allies, still ruled. The Babylonian army was easily routed and Merodach-baladan fled in terror to Beth-Yakin in the marshes, his ancestral stronghold. Sargon entered Babylonia in triumph, and in the following year he pursued the fleeing king, stormed the city of Beth-Yakin, deported its people, and compelled all the Babylonians and Elamites, to pay him tribute, homage and obedience.

### **Sennacherib and the Siege of Jerusalem**

In 705 BC, in the flower of his age and at the zenith of his glory, Sargon was assassinated to be succeeded by his son, Sennacherib (704-681 BC), whose name is well known to bible students. He was an exceptionally cruel, arrogant, revengeful, and despotic ruler, but a monarch of wonderful power and ability. His first military expedition was directed against Merodach-baladan, of Babylonia, who, at the news of Sargon's death, had returned to Babylonia, assuming the title of kings and murdering Marduk-zakir-shumi II (703 BC, 1 month), the viceroy appointed by Sennacherib. Merodach-baladan was, however, easily routed by Sennacherib. Fleeing again to Elam and hiding himself in the marshes, but always ready to take advantage of Sennacherib's absence to return to Babylon.

In 701 BC, Sennacherib marched eastward over the Zagros mountains and towards the Caspian Sea. There he attacked, defeated, and subdued the Medians and all the neighbouring tribes. In the same year, he marched on the Mediterranean coast and received the submission of the Phoenicians, the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Edomites. He conquered Sidon, but was unable to lay hands on Tyre, on account of its impregnable position. Thence he hurried down the coast road, captured Askalon and its king, Sidqa. Turning to the north he struck Ekron and Lachish, and dispersed the Ethiopian-Egyptian forces, which had assembled to oppose his march. Hezekiah, king of Judah, who together with the above-mentioned kings had rebelled against Sennacherib, was thus completely isolated, and Sennacherib, finding his way clear, marched against Judah, dealing a terrific blow at the little kingdom. Here is Sennacherib's own account of the event:

But as for Hezekiah of Judah, who had not submitted to my yoke, forty-six of his strong walled cities and the smaller cities round about them without number, by the battering of rams, and the attack of war-engines, by making breaches, by cutting through, the use of axes, I besieged and captured. Two hundred thousand one hundred and fifty people, small and great, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, and sheep without number I brought forth from their midst and reckoned as spoil. Himself I shut up like a caged bird in Jerusalem, his royal city. I threw up fortifications against him, and whosoever came out of the gates of his city I punished. His cities, which I had plundered, I cut off from his land and gave to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, to Padi, king of Ekron, and to Silli-Bel, king of Gaza, and made his territory smaller. To the former taxes, paid yearly, tribute, a present for my lordship, I added and imposed on him. Hezekiah himself was overwhelmed by the fear of the brilliancy of my lordship, and the Arabians and faithful soldiers whom he had brought in to strengthen Jerusalem, his royal city, deserted him. Thirty talents of gold, eight hundred talents of silver, precious stones, guhli daggassi, large lapis lazuli, couches of ivory, thrones of elephant skin and ivory, ivory, ushu and urkarinu woods of every kind, a heavy treasure, and his daughters, his palace women, male and female singers, to Nineveh, my lordship's city, I caused to be brought after me, and he sent his ambassador to give tribute and to pay homage.

The same event is also recorded in *2 kings* 18 and 19, and in *Isaiah* 36 and 37, but rather differently. According to the biblical account, Sennacherib, not satisfied with the payment of tribute, demanded from Hezekiah the unconditional surrender of Jerusalem, which the Judean king refused. Terrified and bewildered, Hezekiah called the prophet Isaiah and laid the matter before him, asking him for advice and counsel. The prophet strongly advised the vacillating king to oppose the outrageous demands of the Assyrian, promising him Yehouah's help and protection. Accordingly, Hezekiah refused to surrender, and Sennacherib, enraged and revengeful, resolved to storm and destroy the city. But in that same night the whole Assyrian army, gathered under the walls of Jerusalem, was stricken by the angel of the Lord, who slew one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrian soldiers. At the sight of this terrible calamity, Sennacherib in terror and confusion, departed and returned to Assyria.

The Assyrian and the biblical accounts are quite conflicting, but biblicists are never lost for harmonizing solutions.

- ❑ Sennacherib's own annals will not allude to any reverse he may have suffered, such allusions would be clearly incompatible with the monarch's pride, as well as with the purpose of annals incised only to glorify his exploits and victories.
- ❑ Sennacherib undertook two different campaigns against Judah. First, in his annals, he contented himself with exacting and receiving submission and tribute from Hezekiah. Later, not in his annals, he insisted on the surrender of Jerusalem but met with disaster, which the bible recounts.
- ❑ The disaster might have been a natural one—a sudden attack of the plague, a disease to which oriental armies are subject, lacking sanitation, and before which they quickly succumb. Josephus affirms that in an Egyptian tradition preserved to us by Herodotus (*Histories* 2:141), Sennacherib's army was attacked and destroyed by field mice, which gnawed the Assyrian bow strings, completely demoralizing the army. Bubonic plague is spread by rats.

These biblicist harmonizing guesses are plausible enough, but they have a habit of becoming established truth, and these guesses are presented as truth by clerics and Sunday school teachers. The bible and the Assyrian records do not suggest there were two campaigns, so both have to be ignored to get the plausible explanations

in. It is easier to imagine that the sacred history has had God's wagging finger added to it.

Sennacherib's campaign came to an end, and he returned to Nineveh. For the rest of his life Sennacherib undertook no more military expeditions to the west, or to Palestine. The Assyrian monuments say the allies had finally accepted defeat, but biblicists say he dared not attack Palestine again, for fear of the Lord!

Moreover, while laying siege to Jerusalem, Sennacherib received news of Merodach-baladan's sudden appearance in Babylonia—doubtless arranged in co-ordination as part of the allies' rebellion. He had to detach and hurriedly send part of the Assyrian army to Babylonia against the indomitable rebel. This might have obliged him to lift the siege. In a fierce battle Merodach-baladan was for the third time defeated and compelled to flee to Elam, where, worn and broken down by old age and misfortunes, he ended his troubled life, and Assur-nadin-shumi (699-694 BC), the eldest son of Sennacherib, was appointed king over Babylonia.

After his return from the west and after the final defeat of Merodach-baladan, Sennacherib had to begin lengthy and active preparations to finally subdue Babylonia, which was ever rebellious and had again gotten shot of the Assyrian governor. The expedition was as unique in its methods as it audacious in its conception. With a powerful army and navy, he moved southward, and in a terrific battle near Khalulu, utterly routed the rebellious alliance of Chaldeans, Babylonians, and Elamites, and executed their two chiefs, Nergal-usezib (693 BC) and Musezib-Merodach (692-689 BC). Elam was ravaged, "the smoke of burning towns obscuring the heavens." He next attacked Babylon, which was stormed, sacked burnt, flooded, and so mercilessly punished that it was reduced to a mass of ruins, and almost obliterated.

On his return to Assyria, Sennacherib appears to have spent the last years of his reign in building his magnificent palace at Nineveh, and in embellishing the city with temples, palaces, gardens, arsenals, and fortifications. After a long, stormy, and glorious reign, he died by the hand of one of his own sons (681 BC). The bible tells us:

And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword. And they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead. (2 Kgs 19:37).

The *Babylonian Chronicle*, however, has:

On 20 Thebet [December-January] Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was slain by his son in a rebellion [...] years reigned Sennacherib in Assyria. From 20 Thebet to 2 Adar [March-April] was the rebellion in Assyria maintained. In 2 Adar, his son, Esarhaddon, ascended the throne of Assyria.

The *Babylonian Chronicle* confirms that the murderer of Sennacherib was one of his own sons, but no sons of Sennacherib with the names of Adrammelech or Sharezer have been found in the Assyrian texts. While the biblical narrative seems to indicate that the murder took place in Nineveh, an inscription of Assur-banipal, Sennacherib's grandson, clearly affirms that the tragedy took place in Babylon, in the temple of Marduk (of which Nisroch seems a corruption).

## **Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal**

Sennacherib was succeeded by his son, Esarhaddon (680-669 BC). At the time of his father's death, Esarhaddon was in Armenia with the Assyrian army, but on hearing the sad news he promptly set out for Nineveh, first to avenge his father's death by punishing the perpetrators of the crime, and then to ascend the throne. On his way home he met the assassins and their army near Cappadocia, and in a decisive battle routed them with tremendous loss, thus becoming the sole and undisputed lord of Assyria.

Esarhaddon's first campaign was against Babylonia, where a fresh revolt, caused by the son of the late Merodach-baladan, had broken out. The pretender was easily defeated and compelled to flee to Elam. Esarhaddon, unlike his father, determined to build up Babylon and to restore its ruined temples, palaces, and walls he gave back to the people their property, which had been taken away from them as spoils of war during Sennacherib's destructive campaign, and succeeded in restoring peace and harmony among the people. He determined, furthermore, to make Babylon his residence for part of the year, thus restoring its ardent splendour and religious supremacy.

Esarhaddon's second campaign was directed against Syria, where a fresh rebellion, having for its centre the great maritime city of Sidon, had broken out. He captured the city and completely destroyed it, ordering a new city, with the name of Kar-Esarhaddon, to be built on its ruins. The king of Sidon was caught and beheaded, and the surrounding country devastated. Twenty-two Syrian princes, among them Manasseh (685-641 BC), king of Judah, surrendered and submitted to Esarhaddon.

Scarcely had he retired when these same princes, including Manasseh, revolted. But Esarhaddon utterly crushed the rebellion, taking numerous cities, captives, and treasures, and ordering Manasseh to be carried to Babylon, where the king was then residing. A few years later Esarhaddon had mercy on Manasseh and allowed him to return to his own kingdom. In a third campaign, Esarhaddon blockaded the impregnable Tyre, and set out to conquer Egypt, which he successfully accomplished by defeating its king, Tirhaqah. To effectively establish Assyrian supremacy over Egypt, he divided the country into twenty provinces, and over each of these he appointed a governor, sometimes a native, sometimes an Assyrian.

He exacted heavy annual tribute from every one of these twenty provinces, and returned in triumph to Assyria.

As for Tarqu [Tirhaqah], king of Egypt and Cush, who was under the curse of their great divinity, from Ishupri as far as Memphis, his royal city—a march of fifteen days—every day without exception. I killed his warriors in great number, and as for him, five times with the point of the spear I struck him with a deadly stroke. Memphis, his royal city, in half a day, by cutting through and scaling, I besieged, I conquered, I tore down, I destroyed, I burned with fire, and the wife of his palace, his palace women, Ushanahuru, his own son, and the rest of his sons, his daughters, his property and possessions, his horses, his oxen, his sheep without number, I carried away as spoil to Assyria. I tore up the root of Cush from Egypt, a single one—even to the suppliant—I did not leave behind. Over all Egypt I appointed kings, prefects, governors, grain-inspectors, mayors, and secretaries. I instituted regular offerings to Assur and the great gods, my lords, for all time. I placed on them the tribute and taxes of my lordship, regularly and without fail.

Esarhaddon also invaded Arabia, penetrating to its very centre, through hundreds of miles of sandy lands which no other Assyrian monarch had penetrated before. Another important campaign was that directed against



Cimmerians, near the Caucasus, and against many other tribes, in Armenia, Cappadocia, Cilicia, Asia Minor, and Media. The monarch's last expedition was a second campaign against Egypt. Before leaving Assyria, in the month of Iyyar (April-May), 668 BC, as if forecasting future events, he constituted his son Assurbanipal (668-627 BC) co-regent and successor to the throne, leaving to his other son, Shamash-shuma-ukin (667-648 BC), Babylonia. But, while on his way to Egypt, he fell sick, and on the 10th of Marsheshwan (October), in the year 669 BC, he died.

Esarhaddon was a truly remarkable ruler. Unlike his father, he was religious, generous, forgiving, less harsh and cruel, and diplomatic. He ruled the various conquered countries with wisdom and toleration, while he established a rigorous system of administration. A great temple-builder and lover of art he has left us many records and inscriptions. At Nineveh he rebuilt the temple of Assur, and in Babylonia, the temples at Uruk, Sippar, Dur-Ilu, Borsippa, and others, in all about thirty. In Nineveh he erected for himself a magnificent palace and arsenal, and at Calah another of smaller dimensions, which was still unfinished at the time of his death.

Assurbanipal was the greatest of all Assyrian monarchs. For generalship, military conquests, diplomacy, love of splendor and luxury, and passion for the arts and letters, he has neither superior nor equal in the annals of that empire. He has provided the greatest part of our knowledge of Assyrian-Babylonian history, art, and civilization. Endowed with a rare taste for letters, he caused all the most important historical, religious, mythological, legal, astronomical, mathematical, grammatical, and lexicographical texts and inscriptions known to his day to be copied and placed in a magnificent library which he built in his own palace.

Tens of thousands of clay tablets systematically arranged on shelves for easy consultation contained, besides official dispatches and other archives the choicest religious, historical, and scientific literature of the Babylonian-Assyrian world. Under the inspiration of the king's literary zeal, scribes copied and translated the ancient sacred classics of primitive Babylonia for this library, so that, from its remains, can be reconstructed, not merely the details of the government and administration of the Assyria of his time, but the life and thought of the far distant Babylonian world.

G H Goodspeed, *History of the Babylonians and Assyrians*

Of this library, which must have contained over forty thousand clay tablets, a part was discovered by G Smith and H Rassam, part has been destroyed, and part yet remains to be explored. Here G Smith first discovered the famous Babylonian accounts of the Creation and of Deluge in which so many striking similarities with the parallel biblical accounts occur.

Assurbanipal was also a great temple-builder—in Nineveh, Arbela, Tarbish, Babylon, Borsippa, Sippar, Nippur, and Uruk. He fortified Nineveh, repaired, enlarged, and embellished Sennacherib's palace, and built next to it another palace of remarkable beauty. This he adorned with numerous magnificent statues, sculptures, bas-reliefs, inscriptions, and treasures. Assyrian art, especially sculpture and architecture, reached during his reign its golden age and its classical perfection, while Assyrian power and supremacy touched the extreme zenith of its height, for with Assurbanipal's death Assyrian power and glory sank into the deepest gloom, and perished presumably, to rise no more.

Assurbanipal's military campaigns were numerous. He ascended the throne in 668 BC and his first move was against Egypt, which he subdued, penetrating as far as Memphis and Thebes. On his way back, he exacted

tribute from the Syrian and Phoenician kings, among whom was Manasseh of Judah, who is expressly mentioned in one of the king's inscriptions. He forced Tyre to surrender, and subdued the kings of Arvad, of Tabal, and of Cilicia. In 655 BC, he marched against Babylonia and drove away from it a newly organized, but powerful coalition of Elamites, Chaldeans, and Arameans. He afterwards marched into the heart of Elam, as far as Susa, and in a decisive battle he shattered the Elamite forces.

In 648 BC, Shamash-shum-ukin, Assurbanipal's brother, who had been appointed by his father king of Babylonia, and who had till then worked in complete harmony with his brother, rebelled against Assurbanipal. To this he was openly and secretly incited by many Babylonian, Elamite, and Arabian chiefs. Assurbanipal, however, was quick to act. He marched against Babylonia, shut off all the rebels in their own fortresses, and forced them to a complete surrender. His brother set fire to his own palace and threw himself into the flames. The cities and fortresses were captured, the rebels slain, and Elam completely devastated. Temples, palaces, royal tombs, and shrines were destroyed. Treasures and booty were taken and carried away to Assyria, and several thousands of people, as well as all the princes of the royal family, were executed. A few years later Elam disappeared for ever from history.

In another campaign, Assurbanipal advanced against Arabia and subdued the Kedarenes, the Nabataeans, and a dozen other Arabian tribes, as far as Damascus. His attention was next attracted to Armenia, Cappadocia, Media, and the northwestern and northeastern regions. In all these he established his supremacy, so that from 640 till 627 BC, the year of Assurbanipal's death, Assyria was at peace. However, scholars believe that during the last years of the monarch's reign the Assyrian Empire began to decay.

Assurbanipal is probably mentioned once in the Jewish scriptures (1 *Ezra* 4:10) under the name of Osnapper, deporting troublesome people into Samaria. He is probably alluded to by the *Second Isaiah* and *Nahum*, in connexion with his campaigns against Egypt and Arabia. Some think Assurbanipal is really the Nabuchodonosor (Nebuchadnezzar) of *Judith*. Sardanapalus of Greek historians is identified as Assurbanipal even though their characters seem contrasting. Assurbanipal was not the last king of Assyria, as Sardanapalus is supposed to have been.

Assurbanipal was succeeded by his two sons, Assur-etil-elani (626-? BC) and Sin-shar-ishkun (?-612 BC). Nothing is known of their respective reigns and their exploits except that in their days Assyria began rapidly to lose its prestige and power. All the foreign provinces—Egypt, Phoenicia, Chanaan, Syria, Arabia, Armenia, Media, Babylonia, and Elam—broke away from Assyria. The nation seemed spent. Nabopolassar (625-605 BC), king of Babylon, and Cyaxares (c 625-585 BC), king of Media, formed a family and political alliance, the latter giving his daughter in marriage to the former's son, Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC). At the head of a powerful army, these two kings together marched against Nineveh and laid siege to it for fully two years, after which the city surrendered and was completely destroyed and demolished (606 BC), and Assyria became a province of Babylonia and Media.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?**  
**Puzzles in the History of Israel and Judah (Part I)**

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### **The Scriptures and a Source**

Biblical scholars have felt under pressure to produce results as valid as those of other fields such as history and science. They have been and still are religious people, but want to say more than that religion is merely arbitrary belief, in their desire to uphold their irrational faith by objective and critical methods. They are so desperate to show their beliefs are rational that they become liars for God.

Niels-Pieter Lemche of the University of Copenhagen tells us that the early critics of the scriptures to use historical methods realized that the bible was not a history book telling us God's Truth about a place and nation called "ancient Israel". Biblical historians once accepted this and began in the early nineteenth century to develop methods of source criticism that they thought let them make a distinction between primary historical information and secondary fictionalized expansion of it.

The source of information about the history of Palestine is often only the biblical text. The traditional scholar presents a theory that is based on the text and the text confirms the theory—the hermeneutical circle! This has gone on for almost 200 years, since the early days of modern scholarship at the beginning of the nineteenth century. They say, "Although we cannot prove it, it is a fact!"

Israel still appears a stranger in the world of its own time, a stranger wearing the garments and behaving in the manner of its age, yet separate from the world it lived in.

M Noth

Moses is considered essential to the revelation of monotheism to the Jews, so he must have existed. If he had not existed, the biblicists would have invented him. They do not consider that ancient writers have done just that!

When a modern author writes historical fiction, the writer does not have to be faithful to history. They write history to support the author's goal. Indeed, readers of the modern novel are more interested in the literature than in the historical facts.

What about people of ancient times who never shared our sense of history? Would they have paid attention to the historical correctness of a narrative about the past or would they have placed more emphasis on its aesthetical and moral values? The answer is provided by classical writers. Cicero on the basis of Hellenistic philosophy regarded history not as dealing with the past but as using the past to illuminate the present and future. He called history the "teacher of life."

There is every reason to think the bible was written for this very reason. The hermeneutical circle is simply circular reasoning, and from a scientific point of view false. The results obtained by a false procedure in science

will automatically be falsified and must be discarded. Historical-critical scholarship is based on a false methodology leading to false conclusions, and so 200 years of biblical scholarship is worthless.

## External Sources

The earliest mention of Israel—the only external source that mentions Israel from before the so-called “Hebrew Monarchy”—is the Merneptah stele, often cited gloatingly by biblicists, but the plain truth is that the stele mentions Israel too early for the biblical data. This Israel is included among a host of vanquished foes placed in Palestine in an Egyptian inscription dating to the time of Pharaoh Merneptah, c 1200 BC. This inscription refers to Israel as a people, but not necessarily as a nation. Indeed their land has a different name.

Aside from the mention of Israel that Merneptah says he destroyed around 1200 BC, there is a gap of 300 years to the next references to Israel in about 850 BC—the Mesha stele from Moab, and an Assyrian reference in the Kurkh monolith of Shalmaneser to the battle of Karkar in 853 BC in which Ahab of Sirla’a (presumed to be Israel) participated. The recently found “Bytdwd” inscription from Tel Dan in northern Palestine, mentions an anonymous king of Israel who is supposed to have been killed by the inscription’s author. The Egyptian Shoshenq inscriptions only speak of the “tribute of the land of Syria” and of victories over “Asiatics of distant foreign countries.” A list of conquered towns is given but nothing to indicate a state.

From the eighth century BC, a few Assyrian texts refer to Israel either as “the house of Omri” or simply as Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel in northern Palestine until 722 BC. This Israel is the state of Israel that existed between about 900 BC and 722 BC. Samaria was founded by Omri at about this time according to extrabiblical sources which, at last, begin to fit in with the bible. A few extra-biblical sources can be related to the Jewish scriptures such as Tiglath-pileser III’s regulations in northern Palestine a few years before the fall of Samaria. Most of these are terse references. M Gelinas summarizes:

If we were to accept only the archaeological record and the extrabiblical library evidence from the ancient near east, we would have to conclude that Omri of Samaria, who is referred to in the ninth century BCE inscriptions of Shalmaneser III, is the first known king of Israel.

In the Jewish scriptures, Israel is one of the two successor states to David and Solomon’s empire. The other is Judah. Judah does not appear in Assyrian inscriptions until Tiglath-pileser III mentions Ahaz of Judah about 734 BC. Of the texts, the most important is the report of Sennacherib’s campaign to Palestine. After the fall of Nineveh, a few Babylonian inscriptions refer to Judah or to events that can be related to the fate of Judah in the sixth century BC, the most important being the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle that includes a report of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 597 BC.

Monarchs explicitly mentioned in Assyrian annals		
Israel	Judah	Confirmation
Omri (885-874)		“House of Omri”—Bit Khumri
Ahab (874-853)		853-Battle of Karkar: Shalmaneser III (858-824)
Jehu (841-814)		841-Pays Tribute: Shalmaneser III

		(858-824)
Jehoash (796-781)		796?-Pays tribute: Adad-nirari III (810-783)
Menahem (753-742)		744?-Pays tribute: Tiglath-pileser III (744-727)
Pekah (740-731)		731-Deposed: Tiglath-pileser III (744-727)
Hoshea (731-722)		731-Pays tribute: Tiglath-pileser III (744-727)
	Ahaz (730-715)	730?-Pays tribute: Tiglath-pileser III (744-727)
	Hezekiah (714-686)	700-Besieged in Jerusalem. Pays tribute: Sennacherib (704-681)
	Manasseh (685-641)	675?-Supplies for Nineveh: Esarhaddon (680-669)

#### Notes



- 1. A stele of Shalmaneser III (the Kurkh stele), bearing a figure of the king and Assyrian gods, mentions the conquest of Irkhuleni, king of Hamath, who had gathered allies to rebel against Assyrian suzerainty. Among them is mentioned "Ahab of the land of Israel", "Akha-abbu mata Sir'la-ai", who contributed 2000 chariots and 10,000 men, showing him to have been a substantial king, if it is not an exaggeration to boast the valour of Shalmaneser and his

men.

- 2. Shalmaneser III set up a monument to his campaigns in the central building at Nimrud. Carved on four sides in black alabaster, it is called the "Black Obilisk". There are twenty small reliefs, five on each of the four sides and a considerable account of the campaigns of the monarch over his long reign. Each series of four starts on the west side. The second set shows the payment of tribute by "Iaua, the son of Khumri", taken to be Jehu, who brought silver, gold, lead and bowls, dishes, cups, and other vessels of gold. Son of Khumri seems to mean he is an Israelite, born of the "Bit Khumri". Curiously, the cuneiform text at the top and base of the obilisk, make no mention of Iaua. However, it mentions the defeat of "Khazu'ilu, king of Damascus", taken to be the "Hazael, King of Syria" in *1 Kings* 19:15. The destruction of the Aramaean kingdom of Damascus obliged Jehu to pay tribute, as another Assyrian relic states. It was the first known contact between the Assyrians and the Israelites. Omri is also mentioned in the "Moabite stone" of Mesha of Moab ([see below](#)).



Four of the figures are beardless and likely to be eunuchs or women attendants. Jehu prostrates himself before the king as modern Moslems still do before their god, and Christians make an effort to do when they get on their knees in church. Jehu seems to wear a Phrygian hat!

- 3. A stele found more recently records that Jehoash (Joash) of Israel paid tribute to Adad-nirari III.
- 4. The payment of tribute by Menahem is also recorded in Tiglath-pileser's annals.
- 5. An inscription of Tiglath-pileser III recording his conquests and building operations, lists among the tributary kings "Ahaz, king of Judah", "Iaukhazi matu Iauda-ai". So, his real name was Jehoahaz.
- 6. A fragmentary text of Tiglath-pileser says that the people rebelled against Pekah and Tiglath-pileser placed Hoshea on the throne instead, as a "saviour" of the people.
- 7. Baked clay cylinders, the third edition of Sennacherib's annals, record the invasion of Palestine, the seige of Jerusalem and the payment of tribute by Hezekiah. Also a six sided baked clay prism, the fifth and last edition of Sennacherib's annals (686 BC), is inscribed with the eight campaigns of Sennacherib from 703 to 689 BC, and the seige of Jerusalem appears in the third campaign ([see below](#)).

These ancient Near Eastern inscriptions show that Israel and Judah are not fictitious names—the question is whether they were what the bible says they were. They also mention a selection of kings known in the Jewish



scriptures. They show the succession of these kings, and occasional synchronisms between the kings of Israel or Judah and Assyrian kings that are essentially sound. Sennacherib really attacked Judah in the days of Hezekiah, and Nebuchadrezzar really conquered Jerusalem more than a century later. Nevertheless, the paucity of information, especially about Judah, is striking. E A Knauf (*JSOTSup* 127) declares that “archaeologically speaking, there are no indications of statehood before... the eighth century in Judah”.

The utter lack of epigraphic evidence of biblical history does not surprise any Christian despite efforts to find it for well over a century. From the empire of David and Solomon, Samaria, Judah with its famous Davidic dynasty, and including the forty kings from Saul to Zedekiah, nothing other than the dubious and ambiguous Tel Dan inscription has ever been found. The magnificent temple of Solomon in a millennium of history has offered up no votive offering, though we have them for most, even less well known, Ancient Near Eastern temples. The surprise should be all the greater to those who realise that the Phœnicians, Aramaeans, Moabites, Philistines, and Ammonites have inscriptions, admittedly sometimes not many, but with historical information.

Moreover, the Hebrew inscriptions found are only found in a trapezoidal area just west of the Dead Sea but not extending to the coast except at Yabreh Yam just south of Tel Aviv—an area of much less than 1000 square miles. The coast was Philistia, and to the north west inscriptions were in Aramaic, to the north and east Phœnician, to the south east Moabite, to the south Arabic. This tiny area is minute by any stately standards, and certainly by biblical pretensions. It is smaller than Rhode Island in the US, smaller than Luxembourg in Europe, and even smaller than Derbyshire in England.

Samaritan ostraca were not written in Hebrew but in Phœnician, as were Samaritan seals. Of the inscriptions at Tel Qasilah, the one which mentions Ophir is Philistine. A seal also found here was one of the forgeries that are all too common. The only Hebrew inscriptions found are dated from the eighth to the sixth centuries, but, since the Albright school have made a pig's ear out of dating artefacts in the region, it is hard to be confident of these either. The Albright method was not to date anything significant as post-exile. Persian period strata were set in the neo-Babylonian or even the Assyrian periods. No one has yet sorted out the mess.

The absence of Hebrew epigraphy is a historical problem that should be addressed. The obvious answer is that Hebrew was simply a Phœnician dialect chosen as a sacred language when the Persians set up the Jewish temple state. It was the sacred language but not the natural language of all the people of Abarnahara, whom the Persians called Hebrews, but, of course, it had no history and could not be read by most citizens who used their own language in everyday business, and for whom monuments were inscribed also in their own language. Any actual ancient inscriptions in Palestine will have been destroyed by the Persian colonists and their successors down to the Maccabees to hide the true history of the Palestinian hill country, leaving only the mythical biblical account of it.

In fact, the hills were always poor, and there would have been few monumental inscriptions anyway, and these would have been in cities and so easy to find and destroy. Such evidence of monuments that has been found has generally been fragmentary, only the Mesha stele being intact. The early Rabbinic *Scroll of the Fast* (first century AD) lists a feast day on 3 Tishri to recall the time when “the memory of the documents was eliminated”. That this entry itself was so cryptic encourages belief that the act was being kept secret, because the scroll fully explains the basis of the other feasts it lists.

After the so-called exile, no source outside Judah mentions the Jews until Alexander the Great. Even after Alexander brought Yehud back into history, later references are in Greek, are rare and vague, and when the author is known, he is often Jewish anyway.

Since Judah is neither mentioned in extra-biblical records until the eighth century BC, nor is it found in the ground, it seems possible and even likely that it did not exist before then. The basis of the United Monarchy might be that there was indeed once only one monarchy, but it was Israel, not Judah. Israel was set up as the House of Omri in the ninth century with Judah just a region of it. All the kings of Judah from David until Hezekiah are recorded simply to have “slept with their fathers” and to have been “buried with their fathers in the City of David”. The Deuteronomistic historian gives some details of the death and place of burial of “later” kings, but he knew nothing about how these kings died or where they were buried. It did not matter for his purpose and the formula he devised sufficed.

Of the later kings, Hezekiah must have been born when his father was 11. Josiah died at 39 after being king for 31 years, a father at fourteen and a grandfather at 32. He conspired to kill his “father” who had begotten him at 16. It all suggests anything but a continuous dynasty. It was a succession of usurpers given legitimacy by the biblical authors, when they actually existed at all.

When the Assyrians annexed Israel, the only city they spared was Jerusalem, and this city and its surrounding villages perhaps became Judah, an Assyrian puppet, briefly. The land was given an established historical basis only when the Persians set it up as the temple state of Yehud.

## **Solomon to Omri**

Solomon died and in no time at all the great empire he ruled was split. In the Deuteronomistic History, the two kingdoms, two tiny statelets, are shown as the main centres of the empire of Solomon, all the vassals returning to their previous suzerains or finding independence! So, other countries like Damascus (Syria) had split off. It ought to be clear that the empire of Solomon being spoken of is the Assyrian Empire before Tiglath-pileser III, when subject states were not incorporated into the empire in a bureaucratic or legalistic manner, but were left as nominally independent save only for vassalage obligations, particularly the payment of tribute. The various wars and alliances in *Kings* are simply parodies or allegories of the real alliances between the Assyrian vassals against their suzerain and against each other that arose whenever the suzerain was seen as weak or unprepared, such as when a king died.

Great kings often give their name to lesser successors hoping to inherit through the name the same success and glory. Rameses II of Egypt rapidly gave rise to many lesser Rameseses. No later Jewish kings were impressed by the names Solomon and David. No later kings of Britain chose to be called king Arthur!

The kings of Damascus seem all to have been called Bar Hadad, except Rezin. Bar Hadad I supposedly reigned sometime in 900 to 870 BC, but no one knows for sure because only the bible tells us about him. The bible has several other Bar Hadads of Damascus, and the Melqart Stele mentions one. Y Aharoni offers the explanation that Bar Hadad is the title of the kings of Damascus—they are each the son of Hadad, their God. The kings and even the priests of Israel were “God’s Anointed”, or “Messiahs,” sons of Yehouah, their own god!

Anointing as a ritual of crowning a king is scarcely known in the ANE outside the bible. The king was the chief priest by virtue of his status as king, and so he did not need to crown or anoint himself. The king more usually anointed the god, by pouring a libation of oil over him, just as Jacob did to the phallic pillar he used as a pillow (*Gen 28:18*), and the same ritual appears in Ugaritic texts. The Hittites appointed a substitute sacrificial king destined to die in the king's place by anointing, though one text seems to be the anointing of a co-regent. In Egypt, officials of the Pharaoh were anointed, and so were foreign princesses who became Pharaoh's wives. In Egypt, oil and scrapers were used for cleansing the skin, and doubtless the habit carried over into countries within the Egyptian sphere of influence. From plain cleansing, it could have taken on a significance of ritual purification in preparing an official for office. Since Palestine was for so long a province of Egypt, it seems likely that local officials were anointed as agents of the Pharaoh, and later independent rulers—especially of Judah which was geographically and politically closer to Egypt—adopted the habit.

The word “anointed” in Hebrew is from the root “msh”. Given the Egyptian cultural influence, the Egyptian word “ms”, for “born of” meaning “son of” can be seen in the Hebrew root, but if “Meses” is the Egyptian for son, as is claimed for the name Moses, then the word “Messiah” is “born of Yehouah” or the “son of Yehouah!” The Pharaoh was considered to be God on earth, and his officials were appointed as his sons. They were “sons of God”. When Egypt had to abandon its provinces, god became the local god, Yehouah, shortened in name to “yah” or “iah”, and the son of God became a son of Yehouah or “messiah”. In *1 Sam 16:6*, Samuel visits Jesse and his sons to anoint David as king. David is called Yehouah's “consecrated” or “anointed”—messiah—by Samuel even before he knew him, and so had not yet anointed him.

Yet other people, who were kings in that they acted as kings and were regarded as kings—like Absalom, who showed he was the king by taking over his father's harem, and Adonijah—were not anointed. Moreover, Cyrus, though he was described as God's “anointed” and therefore as “messiah” (*Isa 45:1*), could not possibly have been anointed! It is plain that the ritual of anointing is not what the word “messiah” signifies. Kings and priests were sons of God, and the ritual of officially recognizing this came to be an unctuous one, the process taking its name from its significance—that of recognizing someone as a son of God, a messiah. The real meaning seems to have been forgotten because the word “messiah” has the Egyptian word for son in it, not the Hebrew one, and was incorrectly assumed to have been derived from the anointing. By this stage the power resided in the person of the one doing the anointing, usually the prophet or High Priest. As used in the Jewish scriptures, it becomes a literary device to puff the importance of the prophets.

So, “messiah” means the son of God, and that is why the kings and priests of the Jews were called “messiahs.” Like the kings of Damascus, and all ancient near eastern kings, they were sons of God. This though is the later rationalization of “messiah”, because messiah began as the hypocoristic name or title, “Mazda is Yehouah”, or, if “Yehouah” is interpreted, as all biblical translators interpret it, as meaning Lord, then Messiah is “Mazda is Lord”, identically the same as Ahuramazda—“the Lord is Mazda!”

If all kings of Syria were Bar Hadad, then any of them from a later age could have been retrojected in time for the sake of mythology, and no one would be any the wiser. So, Asa of Judah allied with a Bar Hadad against Israel by offering a substantial bribe or tribute! The kings of Damascus took substantial areas of Israel from her, and starting a long period of enmity, according to the bible. King Asa had to depose his own mother. She had the title “The Lady” (“gebirah”) suggesting she was really a goddess. Asa means “Saviour”. Asa “saved” people from “The Lady” because of some cultic offence which is left unspoken.

The scriptural account has it that Asa secured the frontier between Judah and Israel, but H Donner thinks Judah remained a vassal of Israel, although this relationship is “veiled” in the scriptures. The truth, mentioned above and clear from the table, is that Judah never existed independently of Israel until Israel was racked by dissension only a few decades before it was absorbed into Assyria.

## Omri and Mesha

In the north, Omri became king and started Samaria—history confirmed outside of the bible. Even though the Assyrians knew the country by his name (“Bit Khumri”), Omri is almost ignored by the biblical authors who prefer to dwell on his son, Ahab. Biblicists, pretending that empty biblical speculation is scholarship, come up with empty guesses about Omri and his aims, but the truth is that we know nothing reliable about them.

Biblicists systematically undervalue or completely ignore information that conflicts with the bible. An example is that the stele of Mesha of Moab is incompatible with the bible in its detail, even though it confirms that Moab was indeed oppressed by Israel (2 *Kg* 3). The biblicists all treat the stele of Mesha as written in ignorance, and seek to harmonize it with the truth—inevitably the biblical account.

In the story about the campaign of the kings of Israel and Judah against King Mesha of Moab, in 2 *Kings* 3, Mesha had paid a heavy tribute to Israel but revolted against his master after the death of Ahab. The king of Israel invited the king of Judah in Jerusalem to join him in a war against Moab. The allies also included the King of Edom. The campaign opened with a seven day-long march halted through lack of water. The kings turned to the prophet for help and water was made available by a miracle. The prophet predicted the fall of Moab, and sure enough the battle between the Israelites and Moabites ended in defeat for the Moabite army. Mesha retreated to his city of Kir-hareseth where, after an unsuccessful breakout attempt, Mesha sacrificed his son on the wall of his city, “and there was great indignation against Israel”.

Is this a historical report? The central part of the story has to do with the water miracle and the Moabite misinterpretation of it that brought disaster upon their head. When reconstructing the past, the modern historian must reject many sorts of information found in an ancient source. Mythical elements are customarily ignored by modern historians unless they are biblicists studying the bible when they become proof of the activity of God. Despite this, miracles in a historical report are reason to suspect mythologization.

If it never happened, does it mean that this narrative in 2 *Kings* 3 is devoid of historical information? Two inscriptions carrying the name of Mesha, king of Moab exist. One of them is only a short fragment, the second probably the most important royal inscription from the southern Levant ever found.

In it, Mesha describes how Omri oppressed Moab for forty years, during his own reign and the half of his son's. Moab is a tributary of Israel, but the start of the period of subjection was “during Omri's days”, whereas in the bible (2 *Sam* 8), Saul, David and Solomon had subjected Moab over a century before. The Moabite Stone therefore does not support the idea of a united monarchy, or an empire of David and Solomon. Then, Mesha attacked Israel and destroyed it forever. Most of the inscription is devoted to a description of the cities retaken—in Mesha's words—from Israel and Mesha's reallocation of them, all of this made possible by Chemosh, the god of Moab, just as Yehouah made things happen for the Israelites.

It is a hopeless to try to harmonize the texts. Although the biblical text might have some historical information, it agrees negligibly with Mesha's text. There are some general similarities between Mesha's version and the biblical one. Both *2 Kings* 3 and the inscription of Mesha of Moab explain how Mesha revolted against Israel. Mesha was the king of Moab and Moab was, before Mesha's revolt, a vassal of Israel. Israel was not able to subdue Moab again.

Mesha's is a different story, but it is equally unlikely to be true, though it gives us some peripheral detail such as confirmation of Omri as king of the region between Tyre and Egypt (Israel). Otherwise, Mesha's inscription is largely propaganda as the proverbial period of oppression of forty years testifies.

Mesha knows no king of Israel except Omri. He makes no mention of Omri's successor, Ahab—who is mentioned by the Assyrians—and he makes Omri the oppressor of Moab even in his son's time. No extra-biblical evidence can substantiate the plot of the narrative in *2 Kings* 3. Ancient history writing is different from modern historical reconstruction. The text in *2 Kings* 3 looks like fiction that contains only one piece of history—a name—and some general knowledge of the status of Moab in Mesha's time. It is not enough to make the narrative historical.

Even the chronology can hardly be harmonized. The Moabite Stone says Omri dominated Moab for "forty years". The bible says (*2 Kg* 1:1;3:5; *2 Chr* 20:1), "After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel". The Mesha text implies that Omri had a long reign. The 40 years mentioned symbolises a generation, and is not meant to be precise, but a generation is a long time nevertheless. Mesha puts most of this period of oppression in the reign of Omri. Mesha's father was called Chemoshyat, and could have been a puppet appointed by Omri. Omri thus seems to have been a long lived king but the bible only gives him twelve years. The fact that the Assyrians called Israel the House of Omri even after Omri's dynasty was over shows that Omri made an important political impact, also suggesting a substantial period in power, especially if he were a usurper and therefore began from nothing.

Mesha speaks about Israelite oppression that lasted for half the reign of Omri's son who is not named in the Moabite text. The biblical accounts show that the two other sons of Omri besides Ahab, Jehoram and Ahaziah, are vague figures and have, by coincidence, the same names as two contemporary kings of Judah, albeit in reverse order. Ahaziah reigned only in 853 BC, and Jehoram, 852-842 BC. Omri is dated from 885-874 BC, so a forty year period must go into the time of Jehoram. If Jehoram is considered the "son" referred to, then half way through his reign would match Mesha's statement (846 BC). Jehoram fought Moab in alliance with Jehoshaphat who dies in 848 BC, so perhaps the period was mythologized, but it remains curious that Mesha mentions no king except Omri. By omitting the two pale kings, G Garbini thinks the bible fits better what Mesha wrote.

That Omri oppressed Moab in the time of his son suggests that Omri might not be Omri the king of Israel but the eponymous king of *Bit Khumri*, the "house of Omri", which in Assyrian documents of the ninth and eighth century BC is the usual name of Israel. The kingdom of *Bit Khumri* (taken to be Israel) was the only kingdom noted by the Assyrians between Tyre and Egypt. Israel supplied the thousands of troops for the battle of Karkar in 853 BC, prior to Mesha's revolt, not Judah. Omri and Israel in the Mesha inscription are the same.

The Mesha inscription does not make *2 Kings* 3 a reliable historical source, nor does it change its genre. The historian can accept only that both accounts agree that the Moabites were subject to the Israelites under Omri's dynasty for several decades, then they gained their independence. *2 Kings* 3 remains miraculous and fictional although it mentions a historical king of Moab and refers to a general political situation that may have some historical nucleus.

A reasonable hypothesis is that there was no Judah in the time of Omri. It was part of Omri's kingdom, but under Ahab, the kingdom fell apart and Ahaziah and Jehoram briefly ruled the separatists of Judah. Mesha was able to get his own independence for Moab in the same circumstances of Omride weakness. When Jehu was anointed by an anonymous prophet, he said (*2 Kg* 9:7), "Strike down the house of Ahab, your master", so the bible tells us that Jehu was rebelling against Ahab not Jehoram, who conventionally precedes him.

### **Ahab to Jereboam**

In the scriptures, Omri's son, Ahab, married the daughter of the king of the Sidonians (*1 Kg* 16:32) but Josephus, in *Antiquities*, says it was the daughter of Ithbaal of Tyre and Sidon. Either way, Soggin thinks that Jezebel was not her proper name because it means "Without Glory", so it was an insulting nickname. It could however have meant "Baal Unifies" or be a deliberately distorted form of "Baal Sows", in which case it is the equivalent of Jezreel ("God (El) Sows"), the name of the valley which is prominent in the story and which is considered cognate with "Israel", but with Baal as the theophoric element. So the respectable name of the queen in fertility religions was punned into disrespect.

Jezebel is set up to be what she is recognized as being—a wicked foreign woman. She has extraordinary power and can only be a literary figure. She is the fairy tale witch, and *they* are demonized goddesses. If she was really such a power and influence over her husband, the bible negates it by having him call his children by the acceptable theophoric names, Ahaziah and Jehoram (Joram).

In *1 Kings* 17:1ff, the two fertility gods, Baal and Yehouah are in conflict, and Yehouah and his prophet Elijah, whose name ("My God is Yehouah") is curiously appropriate to the job, succeed. The conflict will reflect genuine rivalry between different fertility gods, both sons of El, that was part of Canaanite culture and myth. An ostrakon found in Samaria had the name "Egelyau" scratched on it. It means "The Calf is Yehouah." The high god of the Canaanites, El, was a bull, and the name suggesting that a calf was Yehouah, means that Yehouah was a son of the bull, El. A small bronze bull has been found at a High Place, in Samaria. So, Yehouah might have been worshipped as a calf, as the bible implies but wants to reject.

The Persians, after the "Return" eventually favoured Yehouah and so the outcome was clear to the original founders of Judaism, but probably reflected the growing preference among Canaanites for Yehouah anyway.

The first biblical king of Israel was Jeroboam, called Jeroboam I because there is another Jeroboam who ruled Israel in the eighth century. Jeroboam is the only Jewish royal name that needs a number added to distinguish one from another. All other kings of Israel and Judah have names unused by other kings of the same country.

In the scriptures, Jeroboam fled to Egypt and was received by Shishak (*1 Kg* 11:26,40). This would have been



possible for Jeroboam II as well as Jeroboam I! In the Hebrew bible, Shishak appears as Shishak or Shoshaq but he is not Pharaoh. His title is “king of Egypt”, suggesting that he was a minor king ruling at a time of division. Sheshonq III ruled in Egypt from 835 BC to 783 BC while Jeroboam II became co-regent in 794 BC and sole ruler in 781, and ruled until 754 BC. He could therefore have sheltered with a Sheshonq in Egypt before he became ruler. Why should Sheshonq I have attacked Jeroboam I, supposedly an ally? The inconsistencies suggest that different Sheshonqs and Jeroboams are involved. The bible has confused people in the eighth century with people in the tenth. Biblicists will not seriously consider such possibilities.

The Aramaean Wars of Ahab and Jehoshaphat seem to be baseless. Anonymous stories have been attributed to the kings but they could have originally been set anywhere or nowhere. The reason is that Assyrian records suggest the exact opposite. In the time of Omri and his successors, the Aramaean kingdoms were in alliance against Assyria and not fighting against each other. The scriptural tales are invented for a non-historical purpose—to illustrate true and false prophecy. This was an aim of the Persians and the Deuteronomists who wanted to impress on the locals how to make the right choices. Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC), possibly the real Solomon, campaigned against the west for several seasons in his reign and mentions Omri. The annals of this king also say the Aramaean kingdoms were in alliance—Ahab, Hadadezer and Irkuleni fought against him at Karkar on the Orontes in 853 BC. Ahab is depicted in the bible as a major element of the allies.

The Assyrians claimed victory, but it was either not a victory or it was indecisive because further battles were fought with the alliance in 849 BC, 848 BC and 845 BC. Possibly these were punitive attacks to enforce payment of tribute, but they show the alliance in action, so the Aramaean states were unlikely to have been fighting each other, as the Jewish scriptures make out, and they affirm quite the opposite political and military situation—the alliance had a ferocious common enemy. The bible is silent about the wars against Shalmaneser, and the battle of Karkar never happened in the holy history!

J Strange noticed that Jehoram was the name of simultaneous kings of Judah and Israel, and thought they might have been the same man. Strange is unlikely to think that Israel and Judah were different names for the same place, but the best explanation of the peculiarities of the accounts of the two is that they were. A Jehoram or Joram reigned in both Israel and Judah from about 852 to 841 BC. No other Jehoram ever ruled in either country. The Israel Jehoram was preceded by an Ahaziah, supposedly his brother who ruled for a single year. The Judah Jehoram was followed by an Ahaziah, supposedly his son, who ruled only in the year 841 BC.

Not much later than Jehoram, two more kings with the same name, Jehoash or Joash, were contemporaries, though not precisely—Jehoash of Judah 835-796 BC) and Jehoash of Israel (798-782 BC). These are amazing coincidences, and look very much as though the same men are serving in two capacities, or that there was really only a single kingdom, anyway, and some kings are made to appear twice. The monarchy was never divided except for brief periods of rebellion. Judah only existed independently when Israel ceased to be.

Only the biblical texts which form part of the Deuteronomistic and Chronistic history provide material for reconstructing the period of the kingdom of Judah which extends from the end of the tenth century to the middle of the eighth century BC.

J Alberto Soggin

Put bluntly, the divided monarchy could all be a myth and fiction and no one would know any better. Judah

appears on the scene only a few years before Israel disappears from real history suggesting that it only separated itself from Israel about the time that Israel was subsumed by Assyria. The king lists admit that both countries had the same kings, although a lot of mythical ones have been invented for Judah.

Ostraca found in Samaria are inscribed with hypocoristic names incorporating Baal, like Abibaal, Baala, Baalzamar, Baalzakar. In the bible, Ahab, an Israelitish king who is an idolator, calls his children names incorporating the god Yehouah—Ahaziah, Athaliah and Jehoram. Why should the idolatrous king have done this when his people favoured Baal? Athaliah (“Yehouah is Great”), whose brother is Israelite Jehoram, marries Judah Jehoram and introduced the worship of Baal into Judah, the bible says. She is so much opposed to Yehouah that she refused to worship in the “House of Yehouah”, and was overthrown and killed in a coup which began in the temple. She evidently retained her theophoric name in Yehouah, though.

Sela (Selah), the capital of ancient Edom (2 *Kg* 14:7-8), is unknown, but seemed to be a stronghold shut in by mountain cliffs. The word means “rock” and is often mistranslated simply as rock in the bible when the place is obviously meant. It must have been the same place as Petra, the capital later of the Nabataean Arabs. Petra is “rock” in Greek. The trouble is that detailed excavations of Petra show it was founded not before about 700 BC and so could not have been conquered by Amaziah (798-767 BC) and renamed by him Joktheel after he had pleasantly thrown 10,000 of the city’s people over the edge of the cliff (2 *Chr* 25:12). It suggests that the history of Judah before the middle of the eighth century is fictitious.

According to the Jewish scriptures, Jehu (Iaua, Yehouah) came to the throne by a *coup d’état* and so was not an Omride, but the Assyrian records seem to think he was. Jehu, it seems, overthrew not Jehoram but Ahab, who had lost control, and, perhaps by killing his two sons, united the kingdom of Samaria again.

A *coup* seems to have occurred about the same time in Syria where Hazael, described in the Assyrian inscriptions as a “son of no-one”, implying he was a usurper, came to the throne. The outcome was the end of the alliance against Assyria. The best explanation of this is Assyrian machinations. Pro-Assyrian factions had seized power. Jehu appears on Shalmaneser’s black obelisk in his first year (841 BC, see above) in abject submission in the Moslem style of obeisance, the only king of Israel pictured by contemporaries. Even though Israel and Aram were both Assyrian vassals, the bible depicts them as warring. Usually vassalage treaties forbade local wars.

The scriptural plot is that Syria, Israel and Judah were at loggerheads from now on. It implies that Israel had a policy of favouring Assyria against Syria. 2 *Kings* 13:5 mentions a “saviour” who relieved Israel from the Syrians. It might have been Adad-nirari III who marched west several times and eventually forced Damascus into vassalage (797 BC). Adad-nirari lists Joash as a tribute payer. Joash might have been the Assyrian puppet or nominee in Israel. The bible depicts Joash as again fighting Syrians. He also fought Amaziah of Judah taking treasure and hostages back to Samaria (2 *Kg* 14:8-14).

The biblical author contrives a continuous dynasty of David in Judah, but Judah did not even exist, except perhaps as a region, at this time. Several of the kings look dubious as part of the Davidic line. Joash was hidden in the temple for six years then emerged as a king, a popular ruse of usurpers wanting to claim legitimacy, especially in the ANE at that time, seeming to give God’s approval. Mario Liverani has convincingly shown that this was a favourite mythical theme of the ancient near east—the young son who returns from obscurity to

retrieve his birthright. It is the stuff of fairy tales and occurs often in the bible. This Joash of Judah, a contemporary of Joash of Israel, is an example. In fact, no one knows whether such a pretender is genuine. Joash is produced by the priest after six years, presented as the rightful heir to the throne, and on that basis, the wicked queen is killed. The priest could more easily have planned it all, picked a boy to play the heir and assured the people of its truth. If the queen was unpopular, they would have readily accepted it, true or not. And, if this was history, the cunning priest resurrected the dynasty of David after it had been expunged. If so, later kings, though of the line of David, were not genetically of the same line.

Jeroboam II (786-746 BC) of Israel gets only *2 Kings* 14:23-29 to cover the 40 years of his reign, even though he restored the empire of David and Solomon—except for the allegedly independent state of Judah. That he reigned the magical 40 years, like David and Solomon, does not give us confidence that his history is likely to be true.

The bible shows him conquering Phoenicia, Damascus, Hamath and apparently Ammon and Moab. The excuse given by scholars for this military success is the same as that given for the growth of the tenth century empire—Assyria was temporarily weak! If this is at all true, it will be the source of the legends of David, Solomon and the earlier Jeroboam—by retrogression. Even so, it seems unlikely that any such a large kingdom was carved out of Assyrian vassals unless it was really a romanticized reference to the alliance of these states against the Assyrians, with Jeroboam fictitiously put at their head. Since there was no such empire, when Jeroboam dies the kingdom broke up for the second time! It makes Solomon's empire a romanticized version of this eighth century alliance.

*2 Kings* 14:28, an imperfect text, suggests Jeroboam occupied Damascus. Jeroboam might really have profited from the Assyrian conquest of Damascus, and been allowed to administer Syrian land in Transjordan. If so, he was a puppet or military agent of Assyria.

### **Uzziah to the Assyrian Conquest**

Two seals have been found of officials of the ruler, 'zyw (Uzziah), a northerner, judging from his name ending in yw. He must have been a northern leader and therefore a king of Samaria, but the only Uzziah in the bible was a long lived ruler of Judah—Uzziah, king of Judah for 50 years, 25 as a regent with his father Amaziah, and 25 in his own right (791-740 BC).

A small slab little more than a foot square in the Israel museum in Jerusalem seems to confirm the king, mentioning the bones of Uzziah, in an Aramaic inscription which said:

To this place have been transferred the bones of Uzziah king of Judah. Let no one open it.

E L Sukenik claims to have found it some time in 1931. Epigraphy dates the inscription to between 50 BC and 50 AD, around the time of Jesus, 800 years after Uzziah was supposed to have lived. Other than this there is no extra-biblical evidence that Uzziah, such a long-lived ruler, ever lived at all! Sukenik claims to have found the inscription among others in the Russian Church on the Mount of Olives, where they had supposedly been since the time of Archimandrite Antony (1865-1894), but there is no other evidence of this. Sukenik also speaks of "inscriptions" but only got round to publishing this one. Archimandrite Antony knew no

Hebrew and sent notes of Hebrew inscriptions for translation to D Chwolson, whose own records do not mention any Uzziah inscription. The accepted collection of classic Jewish inscriptions has not valued it enough to include it, and both A Vincent as early as 1932, and G Garbini in 1985 have declared the inscription so doubtful that it must be forged. Either Sukenik was responsible or he was a dupe.

Uzziah is another way of writing Azariah, and this biblical Uzziah was also called Azariah. An Azariah seemed to be mentioned by Tiglath-pileser III as leader of a north Syrian coalition of cities (738 BC) in a textual fragment which read "...yau KUR yaudi". Soggin writes that "the chronology of the period is controversial", and some now date this inscription to the time of Sennacherib, saying it must refer to Hezekiah. Maybe, but there is cause to be doubtful. The reference to Yaudi here is the name of the northern Aramaean kingdom that biblicists never speak of as too confusing for their flocks. There were two Judahs! Emil Kraeling, author of an history of the Aramaeans, said Azriyau, though he had Yehouah in his name, was ruler of the northern city of Yaudi (Samal) not Judah. Azriyau of Yaudi was a usurper who sought alliances with the "Nineteen districts of Hamath" against Assyria. This rebel was besieged in his city or in a mountain fortress by the Assyrians and seems to have been killed. Kraeling warns he was not to be confused with his contemporary, Azariah of Yehud (Judah), though plainly only the authority of the bible can explain this assertion. The author of *Chronicles* adds to the confusion. He has a king Uzziah opposed by a High Priest called, Azariah!

Though the biblical Uzziah reigned for a remarkably long time, he was supposedly confined for much of it in the chamber of death with leprosy, and his sons Jotham and Jehoahaz (Ahaz) acted for him in matters of state. Contemporary with this Uzziah in the eighth century was a Hiram in Tyre, a Rezin in Damascus and a state of Saba (Sheba) in Arabia ruled by Queens. Garbini surmises that whoever this long-lived king was, he has been mythologized by the biblical author as a king living 200 years earlier—Solomon. It left a long gap in the fictional history that never got filled properly but was stopped up with the notion of a leprous king barely mentionable though he ruled for half a century.

The pair of biblicist crooks W F Albright and N Glueck identified a seal found by Glueck at tell el-Keleifeh by the Gulf of Elath as inscribed "Property of Ytam" and deduced it was the property of king Jotham. Honest scholars noted that the palaeography placed it at least 100 years later than the supposed king Jotham.

Tiglath-pileser III founded the new Assyrian empire after 745 BC. Unlike previous kings who depended on booty alone, he based his new empire on a centralised government, taxing provinces. So, whereas before the conquerors came and went only to come again, like bandits, the new idea was to annex conquered places and incorporate them into the taxable provincial system. Tiglath-pileser III made conquered countries into provinces, divided into easily managed and taxed districts, as in Hamath.

H Donner, writing in *Israelite and Judaeen History*, edited by Hayes and Miller, explains that the stages of incorporating a defeated nation like Israel into the empire were:

1. A traditional vassalage treaty—limited sovereignty, payment of tribute and yielding of all foreign policy initiatives to the suzerain.
2. Any sign of the breaking of the treaty was considered a rebellion, the ruler was deposed and a puppet (perhaps disenchanted royalty) appointed. His kingdom however was reduced, the annexed portions taken directly into Assyrian administration, and much of anything that remained was parcelled out to

loyal vassals of Assyria. Tribute was increased.

3. Any further dissent and the king was deposed and replaced by an Assyrian governor, the country was absorbed into empire, and the ruling elite was deported and replaced by a different ethnic leadership transported in from somewhere else where there had been trouble.
4. The system was loose, and subject to variation depending on many factors, and personal whims.

The neo-Assyrians were unusual in keeping a permanent professional army equipped with chariots and with a cavalry, perhaps learned from the Medes, Persians and Scythians. It also used terror to force submission, and such tactics are depicted in the Jewish scriptures as being those of the Israelites. Cities that did not submit were often sacked and destroyed—their citizens murdered or deported to distant places. Those who remained had to pay large tributes. It is also true that the Assyrians made use of spies, agents and propagandists called “prophets” to sow dissension, demoralisation and terror in advance of the Assyrian armies. Much of the shocking reputation the Assyrians had might have been spread by their own agents spreading fear (*Isa* 5:26-29).

First Tiglath-pileser had to suppress the powerful kingdom of Van (Urartu, Chaldia) which ruled north and west of Assyria, around Lake Van, and in northern Syria around Urfa. Sarduris was its king. The Chaldeans were allied with the small Aramaean states of north Syria but the alliance was defeated at Commagene and 73,000 prisoners were taken.

In 742 BC, Arpad was sieged and fell two years later. The Assyrians thereafter had the whole of Syria at their mercy. The Assyrian king seemed bent on punishing the rebellious Aramaean states. Hamath was defeated and its rulers transported to Armenia, to administer part of the recently conquered Urartu. Nineteen districts of Hamath seem to have been annexed to Assyria. Other kings of small states rushed to offer tribute, including Menahem of Samaria who is mentioned in Assyrian tablets.

Three years later the king was again in punitive mode in Urartu. He devastated the country but the capital city, Van itself, held out. The remaining alliance broke up in mutual recrimination and antagonism. In 738 BC, Assyria had reduced Israel and Syria to vassalage. Damascus, Ammon, Israel, Moab and Philistia were all punished but king Ahaz of Judah supported Assyria.

Ahaz was at this time not the king but, the biblicists say, was the co-regent acting for his father Jotham, who remained king until 732 BC. Ahaz himself never ruled alone, except for the years 732 to 730 BC, because in 729 BC, he made Hezekiah his co-regent! No one seems to wonder at the timid nature of the Judahite kings, many of whom had to have been co-regents of their fathers for peculiarly long times, then appointed their sons co-regents almost as soon as they had the throne themselves. Amaziah (795-767 BC) appointed his mysterious son, Uzziah, co-regent in 791 BC, so the two reigned in tandem for 25 years. Uzziah (766-740 BC) became king in his own right and appointed Jotham co-regent in 750 BC. He was supposed to have been cursed with leprosy, so the latter does not seem outrageous but Amaziah's weakness seems bizarre. The same is not true of the kings of Israel except Jeroboam II. He was co-regent with his father for 13 of his father's 15 year reign, but beside him only two other kings were co-regents, and they look much more likely because they became co-regents only towards the end of their father's reigns. Many scholars puzzle over it but cannot bring themselves to think, “phony!”

Pekah (740-731 BC), who was a usurper in Israel, according to the bible, rewrote history himself, claiming he

was king at the same time as Menahem (753-742 BC) and Pekahiah (742-741 BC). Israel was probably factionalized into pro- and anti-Assyrian parties, and different pretenders had arisen to the throne, financed from abroad—the Assyrians or the Allies. This was the time when political dissension was sown in Israel, and Judah might have split off under the pro-Assyrian Ahaz.

The biblical story is that Rezin II of Syria and Pekah of Israel attacked Ahaz for no clear reason but failed to capture Jerusalem in the so-called Syro-Ephraimite war. Menahem of Israel and Rezin of Damascus are both mentioned in Assyrian stelae. In fact, the Allies, Israel and Syria, seem to have tried to punish and depose Ahaz as the first step of defying their Assyrian overlords. The Philistines and Edomites seem to have been part of the alliance, if the bible is to be trusted here.

The bible makes out that Ahaz now appealed to Assyria for assistance, though he seemed to have been an Assyrian puppet anyway, whence the assault on him by the allies. He is supposed to have introduced an Assyrian altar modelled on one seen in Damascus. So, Ahaz appealed to the Assyrians and they punished Syria and Israel for their incursions. Ahaz was indeed a vassal of Tiglath-pileser III who mentions him (Jehoahaz) as paying tribute and being part of the Assyrian army that conquered Syria.

The allies had to attend to the Assyrian punitive expedition, so abandoned the attack on Jerusalem, but Damascus fell after a two year siege in 732 BC, becoming an Assyrian province. Its elite were transported to Kir (2 Kg 16:9). The propaganda (*Amos* 9:7) was that they were being returned to their true home! While Israel had its rulers deported, it was reduced only to the extent of the Palestinian hills. At the same time Hoshea (731-723 BC) was set up as an Assyrian puppet king in Israel.

Assyrian records say that Pekah was overthrown by the people, so the usurper was usurped, and Hoshea replaced him. The tribute laid upon Hoshea by the Assyrians was enormous, ten talents of gold and a thousand talents of silver. A talent was about 30 kg (66 lbs). The best explanation is that Hoshea was made puppet king not only of Israel, but Aram (Syria, Damascus) as well, but he failed to stay loyal and invited further punishment and annexation.

In 731 BC, Tiglath-pileser III marched against Babylon and became its king. Salmaneser V succeeded Tiglath-pileser III in 727 BC and Sargon succeeded him in 722 BC.

Hoshea acted as a puppet should at first, but seems to have been tempted into rebellion by the change of ruler in Assyria. He refused tribute to the new king, Shalmaneser V, and broke the vassalage treaty by negotiating with Egypt. He allied with the weak twenty fourth dynasty Egyptian king of Sais. Shalmaneser responded by invading Hoshea's domain and put him down and captured Hoshea after several years, showing that he had the resources of more than just a petty kingdom.

Shalmaneser died just as victory was secured, and the population of Israel was deported under Sargon II. So, Sargon completed the subjugation, deporting the rulers and bringing in foreign rulers, admitting Israel to the empire as the province of Samerina (Samaria), the name applying to the whole country not just the principal town about 722 BC. The people brought in seem to have been from Syria, so to a degree the ruling elite of Syria were swapped for the ruling elite of Israel, Sargon, seeming to be saying to the deported rulers: "If you are so keen on allying with each other see whether you like ruling your allies!" Ezra (*Ezra* 4:2,10) says that more



foreigners were transported in under Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal.

The city of Samaria was rebuilt and became the seat of the Assyrian governor, as the Assyrians themselves tell us. Samaria became a more prosperous country. It was simply no longer an independent country but had been taken into Assyria as a tax paying province.

The bible makes out that the people who moved in voluntarily adopted the religion of the land, that of Yehouah. The bible also makes out that the people who later moved out to Babylonia, or wherever, remained loyal to Yehouah. People do not change their allegiance to their gods at the drop of a hat, so why did the people moving into Samaria chose to adopt the religion of Yehouah but those who were moved out did not? The power of the “True God” would be the Christian and Jewish answer. The historical answer would have to be that people who were transported were obliged to adopt and defend the religion of the place they were moved to, according to the prescriptions of their conquerors.

A ruling elite would not immediately adopt the religion of the peasants they had to rule, unless they were obliged to. The same would have applied to any Israelite moved elsewhere, which is why the supposed ten northern tribes disappeared. They would not have had the option of retaining their own religion simply because often deported people were ethnically mixed by the conquerors further to weaken them, and make them dependent on the victors. Those coming into Samaria seem to have been a mixed bunch.

The mixed class of rulers had to defend the god they were told to defend, usually the god of the land or city they were deported into, but according to the manner the conquerors laid down. They had to “restore” the religion, and they had the right to because they had to present themselves to the peasants as a former ruling class deported long ago, and being returned by the grace of the victorious king! The Yehouah that the Persian colonists restored to Yehud was not the Yehouah that the earlier Assyrian colonists had restored in Samaria, and neither was the Yehouah of the original Canaanites. That is why the colonists could not accept help from the natives—they were not promoting the same religion.

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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?

## The Divided Monarchy (Part II): Puzzles in the History of Israel and Judah

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### Twin Statelets - Israel and Judah

Believers in the bible think Israel and Judah were twin states with the same God and culture. Archaeology belies it. Pottery, architecture, landscape and climate were all substantially different, so the two states were far from identical twins, if they could be called twins at all. Israel was more prosperous and closer to the trade routes to Phœnicia, Syria and Egypt. Judah was poor, off the trade routes, in quite high hills, that no one would willingly climb without a good reason, in those days. The Egyptians planted a few watch towers in the mountains, but otherwise, they too were not interested in the almost empty hill country.

Trading countries are more likely to change because they are subject to invaders coming along the routes and because they were subject to foreign fashions and influences. Judah was conservative out of lack of these influences, and sheer poverty. Judah's pottery and architecture were more standard whereas those of Israel were more varied and flamboyant. Architecture was meant to impress in places where merchants and potential invaders passed regularly, but there was no need to impress and few people to impress in the hills.

Israel emerged in history, as opposed to biblical history, about 850 BC. Judah did not emerge until after 750 BC. Pottery factories developed in Israel about 850 BC, but in Judah only after 750 BC. Wine and olive production rose rapidly in the eighth century in Israel, but followed only in the seventh in Judah. Trade records on ostraca, and then seals and seal impressions on pottery appear first in Israel, then in Judah.

Ahaz (732-715 BC) was formally recognized as king of Judah. It will have been Ahaz's reward as a loyal soldier of the Assyrians. Ahaz introduced Assyrian religious practices into Judah, according to the bible (2 Kgs 16:10-16). So, Ahaz and then Hezekiah were set up as Assyrian puppets. Judah was created out of a rib of Israel in the 730s BC, surely from the machinations of Assyrian "prophets", and took over as the local petty kingdom from 722 BC, apparently an independent rump of the former Israel. It seems likely that Judah had previously, for most of its history, been a part of Israel, and not independent, but with Assyrian encouragement seceded at about the time of the alliance. When Israel became a part of the Assyrian empire as its province of Samerina, Judah was all that remained of an independent Canaan. Judah was always a vassal of Assyria or Babylonia. It was never an independent country until the Maccabees.

Menehem of Israel (753-742 BC) and Ahaz of Judah (730-715 BC) paid tribute to the Assyrian ruler. The bible says Menehem paid a huge bribe to the Assyrians to keep his kingship, suggesting it was strongly threatened. His son, Pekahiah, lasted no time before he was assassinated by Pekah. Hosea was set up as the puppet king of Israel in 731 BC, immediately after the fall of Damascus. Hosea was deposed, according to convention in 722 BC, and Israel ceased to be. This was about the time that Judah was invented. In the reign of Esarhaddon (680-669 BC), it is Manasseh of Judah who provides forced labour for the Assyrians.

Israel disappeared from history as an independent country about 720 BC, the same time that Judah appeared,

according to external records. Carchemesh followed because the Hittites of Carchemesh had formed an alliance of small states including the weakened Urartu, but after a six year war the allies were defeated and the king of Urartu, Ursa (Rusa), seems to have committed suicide. Judah was the worthless rump of Israel, and never anything other than a puppet of the Assyrians. For that reason, the Babylonians finished Judah off to complete the destruction of Samaria.

Albrecht Alt surmised that Samaria had ruled Judah until the time of Nehemiah, and that was the root of the bad feeling of Jews for Samaritans. The bad feeling probably came with the refusal of the transported “captives” in the fifth century to accept any help from the native people of the Palestinian hills, but James D Purvis says more recent discoveries have not invalidated Alt’s main conclusion. Who, one might ask are the kings of Judah before this time? The answer is that they are mythical, are city chiefs or are displaced characters from the northern state of Yauda.

Judah was all that remained of Israel when the valuable parts of the country were absorbed into Assyria, because Judah was too poor and unimportant for the Assyrians to bother to administer, though some refugees must have moved there from Israel to avoid Assyrian rule. It was left as wild and unadopted grazing for sheep with some encouragement from *ateliers* in the richer lowlands to grow cash crops of vine and olives. Making and distributing wine and olive oil was then in some ways like the petroleum industry today. It needed sophisticated co-ordination, production and distribution, and provided work for masses of people.

The architecture of cities like Samaria, Megiddo, Jezreel and Hazor have many common features, even to mason’s factory or individual marks in the buildings of Samaria and Megiddo. Towns like these were hilltop palaces built of ashlar stone blocks with a prominent gate, courtyard and place for administration. The ordinary people lived outside this administrative center, the design of which seems to be like that of the cities to the north in Phœnicia. Similar structures have never been found in Judah.

Only with the takeover of Samaria and the spoiling of Lachish by the Assyrians did Jerusalem become important. The bible says nothing much about Lachish even though it was an important town only thirty miles from Jerusalem. Its destruction by the Assyrians, in 701 BC, left an opportunity for Jerusalem to grow from an unimportant small town to replace Lachish as a center for the trade in olives and wine—in short, as the local market town.

The seventh century is always considered a time of religious and cultural revival in the ancient near east with noble monarchs like Assurbanipal, Nebuchadrezzar and Nabonidus collecting together ancient materials. Care is needed however, because the Persians a couple of centuries later surreptitiously enforced cultural and religious unity often attributing it to earlier times through pseudo-histories, pseudographs and legal and religious codification. Thus the Deuteronomic law was introduced in fifth century Yehud but an accompanying pseudo-history attributes it to the seventh century reforms of Josiah. So what is said by scholars to have been an example of Israelite religious zeal of the seventh century is a myth written in the fifth.

Soggin, referring to the supposed religious reforms of Hezekiah, says they have “every appearance of being a projection of later attempts on the past in order to give them greater authority”. If this is true, it is even more true of the reforms of Josiah, a few decades later. These reforms are all described with the unmistakable stylistic stamp of the Deuteronomic historian—the justification for setting up the temple state of Jerusalem, Yehud, in

the Persian period and to restore the worship of Yehouah in the way that the Persians wanted it to be.

## **Hezekiah and Sennacherib**

Hezekiah was king of Judah, of that there is no doubt. He was mentioned by Sargon II and by Sennacherib. Sargon listed Judah as paying tribute alongside Philistia, Edom and Moab. He actually fought three campaigns against Philistia but also called himself the “subduer of the kingdom of Judah”.

It seems Hezekiah was at first a faithful vassal of the Assyrians whom he assisted. An anti-Assyrian alliance of about 720 BC, consisting of Gaza, Hamath and the Samaritans, supported by Egypt, seemed not to include Judah. The Assyrians defeated the alliance and imposed harsh reprisals.

Later, though, in 713-711 BC, Hezekiah was in alliance with the Philistines of Ashdod and other cities, Edom, Moab and Babylon against Assyria, again supported by Egypt. The allies lost again, but Hezekiah seems to have stepped back in time to avoid serious reprisals. Sargon defeated Babylon in 710 BC. Merodach-Baladan was chased into Bit Yadin in the marshes and its conquered citizens were transported in chains to Nineveh. Sargon put down the Elamites, then returned to Hamath which had revolted under a king called Yehubihdi or Ilubihdi, an hypocoristic name that shows he worshipped Yehouah, and that Yehouah and El were even then being equated, and that Yehouah was not, as biblicists insist only the god of Israel. Hamath was a country to the north, inland from Phœnicia, and even there Yehouah was an object of worship. Hamath was defeated and 4,300 people were transported.

Sargon was murdered in 705 BC by his troops and Sennacherib succeeded. By 705 BC, Hezekiah is depicted as the leader of an alliance and takes the king of Ekron, who seems to oppose it, as a prisoner. Merodach-Baladan, now pretender to the throne of Babylonia, was not finished. He had also again seceded in Babylon and supported the allies. He sent ambassadors to form alliances, and the bible mentions them in Hezekiah's Jerusalem. Hezekiah expected to be part of a large confederacy, but Sennacherib was up to the challenge of the allies, cleaned up Babylonia, then came west with a strong punitive force to settle the Egyptians at Elteqeh. Sennacherib wrote after the battle of Elteqeh:

Trusting in Assur, My Lord, I fought with them and overthrew them.

A will, written by Sennacherib, ends with the prayer:

Thine is the kingdom, O Nebo, Our Light.

These show that the Assyrian king regarded his god just as the believers in Yehouah in the scriptures regarded theirs, and even used the same phrases. Having disposed of Lachish by seige, he sieged Jerusalem. Jerusalem was apparently not defeated, but, in both the bible and the Assyrian annals, Hezekiah decided to abandon the alliance and pay tribute for the Assyrians to desist. The tribute recorded in Assyrian archives is 30 talents (a tonne) of gold and 800 talents (24 tonnes) of silver (300 in the bible). Again, this seems a huge charge to place on a small country.

In the story about Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem in 701 BC, the scriptures say that, in the fourteenth year

of king Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them. And king Hezekiah behaved well in the eyes of the Lord, revolted against the Assyrians and smote the Philistines, but when the Assyrian king is at Lachish, Hezekiah surrendered to the Assyrians and paid tribute to his overlord.

Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which you puttest on me will I bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the *Lord*, and in the treasures of the king's house. At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the *Lord*, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

*2 Kings 18:13-16*

But then, the Assyrian king sent his general, Rabshakeh—really the Assyrian High Cup-Bearer ( = Rabshakeh), a ministerial position—to Jerusalem, where, in front of the gates of Jerusalem, he delivered an aggressive speech. Hezekiah, in great distress, turned to the prophet Isaiah who promised the assistance of God against the Assyrians. The Assyrian general returned to his master now about to confront an Egyptian army trying to outflank them. Rabshakeh sent a letter to Hezekiah repeating many of the threats against Judah already delivered in his speech. Hezekiah asked the Lord to help him against the Assyrian army. He obliges by sending His nasty angel to kill 185,000 Assyrian soldiers during the night, forcing Sennacherib to withdraw in dismay. Herodotus records the different story that the army was overcome by the Egyptians because mice ate the cords of their bows. The bible then says Sennacherib was murdered. Biblicists claim the biblical account is contemporaneous even though the death of Sennacherib was twenty years later. It also calls the Egyptian general a pharaoh, Tirhakah (Taharqa), which he did not become for another decade. Knowing the Assyrian minister's title as Rabshakeh implies Mesopotamian knowledge, and the dead Assyrians is the same number as those killed by Narum-Sin, the Sargonid king, legendary even then.

The narrative in these chapters is not a homogenous description of the events of 701 BC. The Rabshakeh incident is superfluous. Hezekiah had already surrendered and paid his tribute to the king of Assyria. The Assyrian king had already achieved his goal, to stop the rebellion in southwestern Palestine. The modern historian would try to distinguish between the historical and the mythological, looking for historical information in the short description of Sennacherib's campaign at the beginning of the narrative in *2 Kings* 18-19, rather than in the expansion that follows.

In the siege of Jerusalem, Rabshakeh, according to the Jewish scriptures, addressed the besieged Jerusalemites in Hebrew instead of Aramaic, so that the ordinary people watching from the walls could understand him. He was invited to speak in Aramaic, the court and diplomatic language, but it seems the people only understood Hebrew. Aramaic became the international language—"Imperial Aramaic", but that was in Persian times. Biblicists conclude that Hebrew was such an important language that High Assyrian officials must have known it, though skeptical historians think it as likely as George W Bush being able to address the Iraqis fluently in Arabic.

The expression, "eat faeces and drink urine", thought to have meant the threat of the consequences of resistance, has been traced to the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* where it simply means death. Copying the *Book of the Dead* was an industry in Egypt in Persian times, as Herodotus says, so the source of the expressions in

both books could have been Persian. If it appears in the *Pyramid Texts*, its Egyptian provenance is confirmed. Even so, the literary matrix of the story could have been Egypt in Ptolemaic times when the Egyptian rulers favoured the Jerusalem priesthood.

The Rabshakeh (2 Kg 18:22) knew that Hezekiah had started a religious reform, but thought he had done the one remarkable thing that he had not done—removed the altars and high places. Josiah only did it, in the bible, a century later.

Archaeologists have found Sennacherib's royal annals of the campaign. It opened with a diversion to Phœnicia, to Sidon, to clear obstacles behind the front line and to safeguard the retreat. In Palestine, the "Judaean" Hezekiah had interfered with loyal Assyrian vassals including Padi, the king of Ekron, who Hezekiah held prisoner. Hezekiah and his allies had also approached the king of Egypt. The Egyptian army had arrived and prepared for battle at Elteqeh. Sennacherib conquered the cities of Elteqeh and Timnah, and occupied Ekron. Hezekiah had to set Padi of Ekron free and he was reinstalled as an Assyrian vassal. Hezekiah did not yield any further but Sennacherib devastated his country, destroyed 46 fortified cities and trapped Hezekiah in Jerusalem. The devastated parts of Hezekiah's kingdom were handed over to the Philistines. Hezekiah paid a heavy tribute, delivered by his envoys to the Assyrian king in Nineveh. In his own words...



I drew nigh to Ekron and I slew the governors and princes that had transgressed, and I hung upon poles, round about the city, their dead bodies. Sennacherib Prism with the fifth edition of his annals, giving the seiging of Hezekiah in Jerusalem. British Museum The people of the city who had done wickedly and had committed offences, I counted as spoil, but those who had not done these things and who were not taken in iniquity, I pardoned. I brought their king Padi forth from Jerusalem and I stablished him upon the throne of dominion over them, and I laid tribute upon him.

I then beseiged Hezekiah of Judah, who had not submitted to my yoke, and I captured forty six of his strong cities and fortresses, and innumerable small cities which were round about them, with the battering rams and the assault of engines, and the attack of foot soldiers, and by mines and breaches. I brought out therefrom two hundred thousand and one hundred and fifty people, both small and great, male and female, and horses, and mules, and asses, and camels, and oxen, and innumerable sheep I

counted as spoil. Himself, like a caged bird, I shut up within Jerusalem, his royal city. I threw up mounds against him, and I took vengeance upon any man who came forth from the city.



His cities, which I had captured, I took from him and gave to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, and Padi, king of Ekron, and Silli-bel, king of Gaza, and I reduced his land. I added to their former yearly tribute, and increased the gifts which they paid unto me. The fear of the majesty of my sovereignty overwhelmed Hezekiah, and the Urbi and his trusty warriors, whom he had brought into his royal city of Jerusalem to protect it, deserted.

And he despatched after me his messenger to my royal city Nineveh to pay tribute and to make submission with thirty talents of gold, eight hundred talents of silver, precious stones, eye-paint, ... ivory couches and thrones, hides and tusks, precious woods, and divers objects, a heavy treasure, together with his daughters, and the women of his palace, and male and female musicians.

The biblical narrative and Sennacherib's annals are two reflexions of the campaign of Sennacherib that ended when Hezekiah gave in and paid the tribute the Assyrians demanded. The two versions agree that Hezekiah rebelled against the Assyrians, Sennacherib attacked his country and destroyed many cities, at the end Hezekiah paid a tribute, but Jerusalem remained in his hand unharmed. *2 Kings* is correct that the Assyrians did not conquer Jerusalem. Hezekiah did not willingly "centralize" the cult at Jerusalem, the Assyrians did it for him by destroying the other cult centers of Israel, leaving only that at Jerusalem. Differences are chronological details such as when and where Hezekiah sent his tribute and how big it was.

Only the siege of Jerusalem in the bible is historical, and the rest is a romance written not before the fifth century—when Aramaic became the Persian *lingua Franca*—and possibly not until the third century when the Greek Egyptian kings commissioned the Jewish scriptures in Greek. Besides the appearance of an Egyptian army in Palestine at this time, nothing else is historical about the Rabshakeh incident. The author of *2 Kings* had proper history to work from but invented the Rabshakeh incident to show the God of Heaven saving Jerusalem. The biblical narrative that follows the payment of the tribute is simply propaganda. After the paying of Hezekiah's tribute, an event that the Persian scribes had found in the annals of Sennacherib's campaign, the rest is added to introduce the God of Heaven propaganda that the Persians wanted to be accepted.

The word used in *2 Kings* 18 and translated as "Hebrew" is actually "Yehudit". It implies that the country was a well established Yehud where the people were Yehudim and they spoke Yehudit. None of this is likely to have been true until Yehud was a temple state, and built up a national pride that reflected itself in the national language that the author could depict an Assyrian government minister as knowing.

#### **"Awkward" for Minimalists?**

Ziony Zevit says "an inscription found in the Philistine city, Ekron, mentioned Achish, a Philistine name, Padi, a name uniquely associated with Ekron in the Bible, and the name Ekron itself". Zevit says this was "awkward" for the minimalists because it supported the biblical account. Zevit's reasoning is:

Since it was hardly likely that people concocting a fictional history during the Persian period, as maintained by most minimalists, could have been aware of this trivial onomastic information, the existence of the inscription undermined minimalist claims about the absence of facticity in historical narratives.

Quite why Zevit says this is unclear because s/he acknowledges in the same article in *Biblica* that minimalists recognize:

For narratives about events that occurred after the ninth century, Israelite writers had access to court and temple records so that more credibility adheres to their contents.

The minimalist argument has always been that the bible has been so mythologised that it is impossible to know what is true and what is myth without external evidence. How is Padi uniquely associated with Ekron in the bible? Padi is not in the bible! As we have seen, Padi is associated with Ekron in the annals of Sennacherib and the biblical reference is the vague passage about Hezekiah:

He rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not. He smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.

Critics of the minimalists, usually biblicists of greater or lesser degree, pretend that the bible was written by God utterly independently of the physical existence of the world. If this monument had been erected around 700 BC, it could still have been standing a few hundred years later when the Persians wrote the Deuteronomistic history, and could therefore have been a source of it. The vagueness of the biblical reference does not encourage the idea.

Nevertheless, the same applies in many other instances. High places probably operated for centuries, so can have been mentioned in contemporary reference to ancient times without the need to have known those times, merely that the bamahs were there then. What few monumental buildings there were could have featured in fictional history, like the supposed gates of Solomon. Minimalists repeatedly insist that the Persian mythmakers were not writing pure fiction. It was set in the right place—the country of the people they were aiming to influence, Canaan. It therefore made use of what existed there and what was known of it, but most of the reliable history came from Assyrian royal records, as Zevit seems to accept.

The letter of Sennacherib in 2 *Kings* 19:10-13 includes a list of nations destroyed by the Assyrians, but it includes Haran that had never been destroyed by the Assyrians in about 600 years, since it was last captured

by Shalmaneser I in the thirteenth century BC. It was an Assyrian province by 814 BC, was never attacked during the lifetime of the neo-Assyrian empire, and was evidently a city favoured by the Assyrians for its strategic position on the road to the West, and for its cult of the god Sin whom they also favoured. It makes the letter look suspicious.

The list of conquered nations repeats 2 *Kings* 18:34 implying that the fate of Judah would be the same as that of the other cities, and Samaria. Moreover some of them are the names of the people deported into Samaria from their defeated cities, as we may assume (2 *Kg* 17:24). Lair was a known city between the lower Zab and Diyala. All seem to be cities from these middle and higher reaches of the Euphrates and its tributaries, though none of Lair, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah seem to have been major centers or countries, and would probably not have been listed had the author not needed them for his purpose, and lacked anything else.

The city of Haran was attacked shortly after this period described in the scriptures, namely by the Medes and the Babylonians attacking Assyria in 610 BC. An author writing some time after this will remember this battle for Haran rather than any earlier one. It offers the possibility that the siege of Jerusalem described as in the time of Sennacherib is really the siege by the Babylonians retrojected into the earlier period. No reader would have known the difference by the time this was being written. Since 1 *Kings* 11:11-13, 32-36, 38-39 speak of part of the kingdom being taken away from the wicked kings' sons, it must have been written after the fall of Samaria, which can hardly have survived the fall of the more powerful city of Damascus in 732 BC for too long. About this same time Judah begins to appear in history.

After the withdrawal of Sennacherib from Jerusalem the scriptures say nothing about the next ninety years.

### **Manasseh to the Babylonian Conquest**

The Assyrians reached the maximum extent of their empire under Esarhaddon (680-669 BC) who subdued Egypt, and Assurbanipal (Greek, Sardanapalus, 669-627 BC) who collected the remarkable library found by the nineteenth century Assyriologists. Assurbanipal was a civilized and wise king, but Assyria was spent by centuries of warfare just as the Greeks were later, and could only decline. In 655 BC, Psamtik liberated Egypt. A few years later, Babylon rebelled and had to be subdued about 650 BC. Assyrian cultural hegemony was soon to pass to the Medes and the Persians.

Manasseh in the bible was a long lived wicked king, but in the Assyrian annals, he was a loyal vassal. Assyrian records of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal both mention tribute by Manasseh. He even travelled to Nineveh to deliver his tribute in person to the Assyrian monarch, and appears with others who did the same on an Assyrian list. They also show that the countries Judah, Moab and Edom now were paying tiny tributes, showing that earlier huge ones mentioned for Judah were for more than the small country itself, or had been so great that the earlier tribute had impoverished them. Manasseh's was a minimal kingdom—effectively Jerusalem—even though he might have had more to administer as an Assyrian governor. The land, though, was devastated, and some cities were deserted. The Assyrian empire was at its greatest extent, and Egypt was subjugated as far south as Thebes.

Josiah (639-609 BC) was the next king of note in Judah. The Assyrians were in rapid decline and could not cope with all their problems. Egypt revolted in 655 BC, Babylon in 650 BC, Babylon again about 625 BC, the

Medes attacked Nineveh about 625 BC, Scythians raided often and, finally, Nineveh fell in 612 BC. Suddenly, Josiah is a king of a large kingdom, like Solomon's, according to *2 Kings* 22-23. What had been Assyrian provinces are suddenly part of Judah! H Spieckermann thinks he could not have had the manpower for it. South of Judah in Arad, however, is evidence of Greek occupation!

The supposed scroll found in Josiah's time is described with a definite article. It is "the" book not merely "a" book. Why were the ancient and revered books of Moses not "the" books already at this time? This shows that the book found was the *first* book of law of the Jews. The story is nevertheless a pseudo-historical myth. No such book could have been found, and there were no circumstances that could have provoked it being forged. Josiah's reform was absolute. No syncretism or compromise with Canaanitish cults was allowed and the only sanctuary was Jerusalem, in the scriptures. At Arad in the Negeb, Yohanan Aharoni excavated a temple said to be to Yehouah that functioned from the tenth to the seventh centuries, when the cult paraphernalia were buried with apparently some reverence. Josiah was supposed to have been responsible for closing it, but why? The excuse is supposed to have been centralization in Jerusalem but it simply illustrates that these "scholars" can find any excuse for anything that suits them. It is not science, and if it is art, then it is rarely honest.

Any such reform would have seemed capricious and unjustified to the majority of people who worshipped Canaanite gods. Reforms or restorations had to be subtle, or done on the basis that no one could have known otherwise. Thus a complete reform like Josiah's could be done after a lifetime's interval because no one could have known what went before a lifetime ago, but in a shorter interval, reforms had to be more subtle and justified to the people by clear motives. Why should Josiah have introduced radical reforms and courted such unpopularity?

What shows the myth is false is that despite the supposed zeal for the reforms they took "considerably longer than the sources would have us believe," as Soggin puts it. He means no reforms happened at all! The temple at Elephantine in Egypt remained operating for two more centuries until after 400 BC, and other sanctuaries obviously continued to operate too. These are disconcerting discoveries "given the principles expounded in the reform". The conclusion of many scholars is that the whole affair is a pious fraud. It was! But it was a pious fraud from 200 years later, and one so successful that Jews and Christians base their religion on it still. F Foresti showed convincingly that any demand for centralization of the cult could not have occurred before the exile, and indeed could only have been conceived in a foreign land where the reforms were already practiced.

Many deliberately broken figurines found at Ophel in Jerusalem are attributed to Josiah's reforms—or Hezekiah's earlier ones according to Kenyon who excavated them—but they could simply be votive offerings, or the opposite, some manner of cursing. They were deposited in a small cave next to a sanctuary. Only those who have to relate what they find to some biblical fiction come up with specially pleaded unlikely answers when elsewhere they would have found a more general and more convincing one.

The Pharaoh, Necho, sought to uphold the rump of Assyria which remained centred on Haran in Syria, and sent a force to help the Assyrian king, though the Jewish scriptures say to fight with him (*2 Kg* 23:29). Josiah supposedly got in the way and was killed at Megiddo leaving Judah now an Egyptian vassal.

Josiah had several sons and the authors of *Chronicles* and *Kings* seem quite confused about them. The eldest son was Jehohanan, or was it Jehoahaz? Who followed Josiah? Was it Jehoahaz (*2 Kg* 23:30; *2 Chr* 36:1),

Shallum (*1 Chr* 3:15; Jeremiah) or Jehoiakin (*3 Ezra* 1:32)? Whoever it was, he was soon deposed and an Eliakim was appointed, but he changed his name to Jehoiakim. Despite this apparent devotion to Yehouah, he was a tyrant.

Jehohanan was younger than the second son, Jehoiakim, but the chapters of *3 Ezra* that repeat *Chronicles* say the first son was Jehoiachin, and he was the one exiled to Egypt and whom the Egyptians replaced by his brother, Jehoiakim! Jeremiah disagrees with all of this, saying that the successor of Josiah was a son called Shallum. Anyway, Pharaoh Necho put Jehoiakim on the throne but, until then, he had been called Eliakim. He reigned for eleven years, presumably as an Egyptian puppet, but even so paid homage to Nebuchadrezzar, the king of Babylon. In 605 BC, Nebuchadrezzar defeated Necho at Carchemish, and Jehoiakim switched his allegiance. The country was divided into pro-Egyptian and pro-Babylonian factions, and prophets were propagandists for one faction or another. Jeremiah spoke for the pro-Babylonian, anti-Egyptian lobby. Then Jehoiakim fought some wars against his new overlord but still died in his bed. *2 Chronicles*, however, said he was deported to Babylonia, but first he retrieved a brother from Egypt. This brother was yet another one, because he was called Zarhi (Zarios), unless he was Jehoahaz by another name!, this being from *3 Ezra* again. Necho invaded Asia again in 601 BC, and Jehoiakim again switched his allegiance. Nebuchadrezzar was annoyed and seized Jerusalem, in this version killing the king (*2 Kg* 24:8-17). Josephus says that Jehoiakim was killed by Nebuchadrezzar in Jerusalem.

The son of Jehoiakim was another Jehoiachin, who ruled for three months in 598 before being sent to Babylon with the whole royal household by Nebuchadrezzar. Babylonian records identify a Yaukinu, king of Judah, and was in captivity there effectively under house arrest for 32 years. Exiled royalty were not literally imprisoned in Babylon. They were treated honourably as courtiers, the court being where they could not do harm because they were under close scrutiny. Evil-merodach released him, but he seems not to have returned to Judah. Jehoiachin was a father several times in exile, one of his sons also being called Jehoiachin, and also mentioned in the Babylonian chronicles. All of these extra-biblical sources always called Jehoiachin the king of Judah, even though he remained in exile in the land of his conquerors. Since the actual rulers, the Babylonians, called Jehoiachin the king of Judah, that is what he must have been, and no one else! The biblical Zedekiah (Mattaniah) must therefore have been a governor.

Seals have been found inscribed with, "Eliakim, minister of Jehoiachin". As Jehoiachin at most ruled in Jerusalem for only three months, the seals most likely refer to ministers acting for the exiled king in Babylon. Thus, Zedekiah was perhaps the governor who was the chief of the substantive government of several ministers, nominally acting for Jehoiachin, but in practice for the Babylonian king. Moreover, if this Eliakim on the seal is the son of Josiah who became Jehoiakim, then the *3 Ezra* story looks to be the right one.

## **Babylonia and Persia**

The *Lachish Letters* are a collection of ostraca with messages apparently written by defenders of the city at some time when it was under attack. The "scholars" say they show that Yehouah was essentially the exclusive god of the soldiers' families. All of them have the name Yehouah in them in hypocoristic form. Not one contains the name of Baal or El. Yet, as we saw above, plenty of biblical idolators seem to have preferred to be known by names in Yehouah even when the biblical story was that they were worshippers of Baal. Athaliah, for example. Not that the scholars are likely to be wrong here, but it shows how they can call heads or tails and still claim

they are right. God's truth!

The scholars say these ostraca date to the fall of Judah, and the defenders were being seiged by the Babylonians. Perhaps they are right, but Palestinian dating has been distorted by the machinations of the W F Albright school of mendacity which has effectively eliminated the Persian period by dating all Persian strata as late Assyrian. Inadequate consideration has been given to these letters being from Persian times, and inadequate consideration has been given to honestly dating the layers excavated at Lachish. Egypt had a major uprising in the middle of the fifth century, and, shortly after, the Persian general, Megabyxos rebelled in the same area because his promise to Greek mercenaries fighting for the Egyptians had been flouted by the king's wife. The destruction from these two rebellions must have been considerable and plain enough to see if not to identify easily, but no one can find it because all destruction is either by Nebuchadrezzar or by Joshua.

The Lachish letters are mainly dated by the similarity of their language and the names mentioned to Jeremiah, the biblical prophet who was supposed to have been a contemporary. The explicit mention in the letters of the absence of signals from Azekah, eleven miles north of Lachish is also taken to tie in with Jeremiah's account of the attack (*Jer* 34:7). "Jeremiah" might, however, have been writing pseudepigraphy, not history, to show that the same fate awaited the Jews as happened when Nebuchadrezzar wiped out the city, so the content of his book is contemporary, but not with the Babylonian conquest, with the Persian punitive expedition.

Biblicists think, because of their preconceptions, that Jews adopted Babylonian names, and some later swapped back to Jewish names. When Judahites were deported to Babylon, they dropped "Yahu" from their names in favour of "El". On one seal, a woman called Yehoyishma, taken to signify that she was Jewish, says she is the daughter of Samassarur, a man with a Babylonian name. For biblicists this exemplifies the Jew given a Babylonian name by his exiled father but returning to a Jewish name for his daughter.

One wonders why the Jewish man given the Babylonian name could not change his own name. They freely changed "Yeho" to "El" when they went to Babylon, so why not change "Samas" to "Yeho" and translate the name into Hebrew? The simpler explanation is that Babylonians were converting to a new sect of Yehouah. It was probably seen as a novel form of worshipping Ea, the Babylonian Oceanus, one of the Babylonian major gods. The Persians saw Yehouah as the equivalent of Ahuramazda and promoted the sect as a non-Persian form of their own religion.

Cunieform tablets from Nippur are records of the large Babylonian bank called Murashu. Scholars says that among them are contracts pertaining to Jews living in 28 districts of the region. How do they know that these people are Jews? How else but that they have Jewish names. Soggin confirms that the clients of the Murashu bank in Persian times with Yehouah in their hypocoristic name are assumed to have been exiled Jews. If so, in little more than a century, large numbers of the people supposedly deported from Judah had become extremely rich.

Whatever these "Jews" were, they borrowed money at the same rate as other customers, so were not discriminated against in money lending. Several have been identified as senior members of society, and one seems to have been a partner or senior executive in Murashu itself. Another was a government civil servant. Yet another had a military fiefdom obliging him to render military service, or find someone who would.



These people were not slaves or captives in any sense demanded by the bible. The bank records are from the fifth century—in the Persian period at the very time that the Persians set up the Jewish temple state. It was in the century after they had been taken into captivity by the Babylonians as slaves. *Ezra* 2:65 says that the Jews who returned owned slaves of both sexes, supposedly only 70 years after they were carried off in chains. These returning Jews in the biblical story cannot have been the Judahites who were taken into captivity. Either these people were not the same as those deported, or those deported can never have been captives. There is no doubt that Jehoiachin and his family were not free, although they were not kept in a dungeon, as their ample rations in the Babylonian annals show us. Zedekiah, on the other hand, the scriptures say was blinded and his family apparently killed.

So, it is hard to imagine that those deported from Judah were allowed to do as they pleased, and particularly make fortunes in only a few generations. If they were free, then why did they have to wait for Cyrus to allow them to return? Deportation only makes sense if those deported are given onerous duties that fully occupied their attention to stop them from plotting. The records of Murashu and Sons show that Yehouah was a highly respected god. Since he appears to have been the Canaanite version of the Babylonian god, Ea, he possibly appealed to Mesopotamians too as an exotic version of their old god.

Casiphia (*Ezra* 8:17) is called “the place” Casiphia, “place” being “meqom” in Hebrew. It is yet another of those mistranslations meant to hide the true story from the gullible believers, because “meqom” means a “holy place,” a “shrine” or “sanctuary,” not just “a place”. The plain conclusion from the passage is that Ezra is visiting a shrine—presumably Jewish!—to recruit people for the task ahead of building a temple state.

There is a notable relationship between forms of “exilic” worship and waters. In *Psalms* 137, there is weeping besides the waters—a mourning rite. Ezekiel had his visions of God, like Zoroaster, beside a river, the Khabur (*Ezek* 1:1-3:15), suggesting he was participating in some sort of rite or cleansing by it. According to Walter Zimmerli, Jews in the Greek and Roman diasporas preferred to build their place of prayer by water. This is confirmed in *Acts* 16:12-13. Ezekiel in his description of the temple specifies water flowing from the altar. All of these are Zoroastrian habits, water being one of their pure elements.

Psammetichus I (Psamtik, 662-610 BC) used foreign mercenaries to garrison his border stations, a policy that his successors continued. Canaanites were among those hired by the Egyptian army to man such stations. The Elephantine Papyri date from the century from 495 to 399 BC. The Elephantine station might have existed for up to 100 years before the earliest of these papyri, so it could have been set up as a consequence of Psamtik's policy. The mixture of God's worshipped at the Elephantine temple has been explained by a preponderance of Israelites in the garrison, and by syncretism, but B Porten, who has carefully examined all the evidence says that such an idea “dissipates on close inspection”. The Canaanites before the Persian period therefore worshipped a pantheon in which Yehouah was important but not alone!

Ephraim Stern has noted that in the Persian period, Palestine was divided into two regions as culturally distinct as two different countries. The hill country of Judah and Samaria along with Transjordan was one part, culturally Canaanite with Mesopotamian and Egyptian influences, and the Mediterranean coast and Galilee was the other, culturally Phœnician and Greek. In the Persian period, the coastal area, and perhaps Galilee, were administered from Phœnicia, while the temple state was modelled on Babylonian lines.

Stern thinks the Persians had little cultural effect, perhaps because the Persian strata have been misdated, but plainly Persia affected the government, the military, economic life especially trade, seals, coinage and taxation, and last and not least recognized, religion. Yehud itself was a tiny state, as the range of Yehud seal impressions prove. They are found from Jericho to Gezer, east and west, and from Tel en-Nasbeh to Beth Zur, north and south, little more than 30 miles in each direction. *Nehemiah* 11:23-35 exaggerates the size of the state greatly. This all suggests the biblical story of a "United Monarchy" is an idealization of the truth that Samaria preceded Judah and was suppressed in its favour. The Persians sent in colonists who had no regard for the natives whether Judaeans or Samaritans, and the antagonism that ever followed began. Judah and Jerusalem had to be made the center of devotion of the whole country in the invented histories, and the people who were Israelites had to be identified with the later Jews of Yehud. Thus the Jews had three names: Jews, Israelites from the former name, and Hebrews as the inhabitants of Abarnahara, the name sticking with them and not others because the temple priesthood guarded the holy scripts which were in that language, a dialect of Phœnician.

## **Edom and Ammon**

Edom is mentioned by the Ramesside kings Rameses II, Merneptah and Rameses III but no pottery preceding the eighth century attributable to the Edomites has been found. It yells out that the Egyptian dating is too high. These mini-states were coalescing from separate settlements and towns from about 850 BC to about 750 BC, suggesting at least a 300 year error in dating the founding of the Egyptian twentieth dynasty.

In 734 BC, Tiglath-pileser III made Edom into a vassal of Assyria. Twelve years later, Samaria went the same way. The bible makes the Jews hate the Edomites, and no one would deny their mutual antipathy, yet they had as much in common as the Jews had with Israel. Their national god was, admittedly different in name, but the gods of the small countries that surrounded Judah had similar characteristics, and were worshipped in a similar fashion.

The story of Jacob and Esau is an allegory of Judah and Edom, in which Judah would prosper in financial matters while the Edomites would sweat in the fields to earn their living. That Jacob stole Esau's birthright, forcing him to sell it for a mess of pottage, signifies that the Edomites were evicted with little compensation, to allow the Persian colonists to enter Yehud. The two peoples were thereafter perennial enemies. Jacob got his blind father to bless him rather than Esau, but had to flee, and only returned later, a metaphor of the Persian colonisation called "the Return". But Edom did well out of the spice and perfume trade from Arabia, and this is reflected in the reconciliation of the two brothers, when Jacob offers to properly compensate Esau, and he accepts, even though he is quite well off himself. It suggests that the Edomites were able to get adequate compensation when they had become more powerful.

To judge from the excavations in the Negev desert, the pottery and the figurines of the God, Qos, the Negev was Edomite not Jewish. Qitmit and Tel Malhata, excavated by Tel Aviv University, seem to be an Edomite shrine and its nearby residential and servicing village. The many items found on these sites are Canaanite but come from all the statelets in the region. Another shrine was found at Ain Haseva in the Negev about 20 miles from the Dead Sea. Biblicalists are perplexed that Edomite shrines are in places they have God's word were in Judah. If so, it shows that the Judahites of the time, supposed to have been the seventh century, were not the monotheistic bigots they later became. They worshipped the gamut of Canaanite gods and goddesses, according to their own personal preferences, and Qos was among them. The truth is likely to be that the people

of Judah in the seventh century were Edomites, or partly so.

An Ammonite seal found near Hisbon (Hesbon), in the form of a winged scarab with disc and crescent motifs, had Ammonite words inscribed in the Aramaean script. They named their god as Milcom-ur, the exact equivalent of the Phœnician, Melquart. The owner of the seal was Baalyasha, meaning “My Lord Saves”, thought by some to be Baalis of *Jeremiah*. The seal is dated to the sixth century but the fifth is more likely, being when the Persians made Aramaic the official language of the empire, and a more likely time for the events of *Jeremiah*. The Persians seemed also to be keen that their officials should have names implying that they were saviours, as part of their propaganda.

## The Ancient Attitude to History

Is the history of ancient Israel as told by biblical writers exact in any comprehensive way? This history can be split into several succeeding periods, the period of the patriarchs, the time of the exodus, the Israelites travelling in the desert for forty years, the conquest of Canaan, the heroic exploits of the hero-judges of Israel, the period of national greatness under David and Solomon, impending disaster under the kings of Israel and Judah, the exile, and the Persian period. This history ends with Ezra’s promulgation of the *Torah*, the Law of Moses, in front of the assembled inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah. Has this anything to do with real history?

Thomas L Thompson and John Van Seters showed that there never was a patriarchal period. It has nothing to do with history. The exodus passed from history into fiction a long time ago. It never happened. Neither did the conquest. From an historical point of view, the Israelites could not have conquered Canaan by destroying Canaanite forces, simply because the Egyptians still ruled Canaan when Joshua is supposed to have conquered it around 1200 BC. No foreign immigrants left any archaeological mark, and the biblical account about the conquest is so contradictory, it cannot hold water (compare *Joshua* to *Judges* 1).

The narratives in *Judges* about the heroic exploits of the Israelite judges were conditioned by the wish to show how Israel should deal with its enemies, the Canaanites, Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines and Aramaeans—all idolators standing for the apostate Jew. The stories about the judges of Israel belong among the genre of heroic tales that show how the people of Israel had to assert themselves and, more importantly, their God in the face of opposition. It would make any later Jew inclined toward apostasy feel guilty at undoing the work of their ancestors, and tend to bring them back into line.

The empire of David and Solomon believed to have existed in the tenth century BC is fictional. In the tenth century BC, Jerusalem was at most a village or a small town. In the period of the Hebrew kings, although the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah are historical facts, little solid knowledge about them has been discovered.

The authors of *Kings* confess history is not their purpose for writing. King Omri is dismissed in a few verses (1 Kg 16:16-28). He assumed power by a *coup d’état*, he ruled Israel for twelve years and built Samaria. He sinned against Yehouah. The author knows that Omri was a great king—after his death his kingdom carried his name for more than a hundred years—but he tells the interested reader to look for the history of Omri, superfluous to his purpose, in the *Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel* (1 Kg 16:27)! His purpose is not to give his reader a report of Omri’s reign.

Interest in *1-2 Kings* should not be limited to finding historical information that might only be present in bits. Attention should be directed to the purpose of this literature—that it was composed to impress people in the author's present, and not merely to save memories of the past for nostalgia's sake. The past was not interesting except for the examples of good and bad behaviour it provided to condition people's future behaviour. The past justified present arrangements as legitimate or natural.

The history of the small states, Israel and Judah, as told by biblical historians is not totally devoid of historical information. The people who wrote the historical narratives of the Jewish scriptures knew some facts about Israelite and Judaeon history. The difficulty occurs in trying to verify biblical events that cannot be checked by external evidence. How do we solve this problem without ending in the notorious hermeneutical circle? One way would be to approach ancient near eastern history in general to see how it worked and how far it can be trusted.

One step is to recognize the genres of historical writing in the Near East in antiquity. Two genres dominated the field—the year-chronicle system that lists for every year its most important events in a tabular shorthand, and the more extensive royal inscriptions including Assyrian royal annals of the conquests of Assyrian kings.

Sometimes the authors of *1 and 2 Kings* refer to the *Chronicles* of Israel or of Judah. There are now no such chronicles. Were there ever? In ancient times, authors sometimes put in fictitious references, but these chronicles would have been of the shorthand type, if they were genuine. They could not have been detailed reports or contained much narrative. The biblical author invented the reference. Its name was copied from the *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings* now in the British Museum, and if that is so, the *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings* was used as a source of the bible. He wrote in an anachronistic style to suit his purpose.

The chronicles of Assyrian and Babylonian kings are literature—fiction and invention—at least as much as history, and so too is the bible. Royal literature of the kind found in Assyrian inscriptions often contain war reports, but the acts of the king are embellished. Defeats are hardly acknowledged. These reports are composed to impress the gods, who were to approve the acts of the king, and particularly his people. It was propaganda! It was written by the “returners”—the Persian colonists, and they used the *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*. D J Wiseman has rendered the a part of the *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings*—626-556 BC, in the British Museum:

In the seventh year, the month of Kislev, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land, and encamped against the city and captured the king. He appointed there a king of his own heart, received its heavy tribute and sent to Babylon.

This is taken to be a reference to the defeat of Jerusalem in 597 BC because it ties in with the biblical account (*2 Kg* 24:8-17; *2 Chr* 36:9-10). We take it that the king of Chaldea, Nebuchadnezzar, is here the king of Akkad. The captured king is not mentioned here and nor is the substitute king, though we gather they are mentioned elsewhere, and Judah is called Hatti-land, something that is presumably well known to scholars if not Jews and Christians. Why is it not possible that these events, known to someone familiar with the *Babylonian Chronicles*, could not have been used by the authors of the Jewish scriptures as the bogus reason for their “return” to Judah? It was, in short, lifted *mutatis mutandis* from the *Babylonian Chronicles*, by the Persians deporting the colonists into Yehud around 420 BC as the bogus basis for their “return”. The Hatti were the Hittites, and the Hittites

never held Palestine, or did only briefly in campaigns against the Egyptians. It was in the northern Levant that the Hittites held several small Aramaean countries as colonies, and whose people remained with the name Hittites long after the Hittite empire had gone. The people of Yaudi were Hatti but not the people of Judah! Curiously, the part of the *Babylonian Chronicle* referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC is missing!

Although minor sections of *Kings* may have an annalistic background in royal chronicles, most of the literature there neither belongs to this genre nor to that of the royal inscriptions of the Assyrian and later Babylonian type. The authors of *Kings* used some extant annalistic information but only selected what suited their purpose. *Kings* is not written to praise the institution of kingship in Israel and Judah or to establish an exalted position for their kings. Their selection was dominated by the wish to create a generally negative impression of the period of the Israelite kingdom—to show that it is a departure from the just rule of God and that its human exponents were hardly heroes of the Yehouistic faith. Few of the kings of Judah are praised for their piety—all of the kings of Israel are condemned. Royal laudatory inscriptions would simply be the wrong type of literature to quote and are hardly present among the narratives of *1 and 2 Kings*.

Rather than tracing non-existing historical events, the goal of an investigation would be to find out whether some kind of a pattern can be found. Already several years ago scholars realized that the biblical books of *1 and 2 Chronicles* are dominated by a series of stereotypical scenes, each of them having a special purpose—either to recommend a king loved by God or reject a godforsaken king.

Recent investigations have shown that Israel was not deserted in the time of the “exile”. The deportation of Jews by the Babylonians only affected few among the population of the Hill country. There was no “empty land” as postulated by *Chronicles* and other biblical literature. It was a myth. Archaeology shows some of the towns and villages around Jerusalem actually fared better out of the Babylonian conquest than they had done before. Nor were all the people left behind poor. Some of the tombs of the surrounds of Jerusalem have rich grave goods in them during the Babylonian period. Gabriel Barkay excavated the Jewish tombs at Ketef Hinnom, overlooking the Hinnom Valley, and concluded that the wealthy families that owned the tombs continued to live in Jerusalem and bury their dead in these caves throughout the period when the city was supposed to have been destroyed and deserted. Barkay thinks they lived in the suburbs, which were not destroyed. Either, some of the wealthy class remained or they were quickly replaced by new ones.

Mizpah, depicted biblically as the capital of Judah before Jerusalem, indeed was the capital in the Babylonian and the early Persian Periods, when it briefly flourished. W F Bade excavated five of the eight acres that Mizpah covered—an utterly irresponsible act, especially as he completely misinterpreted the signs in the ground—failing to understand his own work and completely missing the Babylonians. G Zorn, six decades later, noticed that some of Bade’s drawings made no sense. Features from different strata had not been distinguished, so that a gate opened on to a blank wall, and such absurdities. Making an attempt to sort out the confused layers, Zorn found a stratum of grand architecture had been confused with earlier lesser stuff. It was the Babylonian period that Bade had missed utterly.

It was so prosperous as an administrative center in less than fifty years that it had already spawned its own suburb. Though Bade had ruined the site for more advanced archaeologists, we still do not have the benefit of his own report on his excavations. It has never been published. Archaeological vandals like him just want to dig, hoping to make amazing discoveries, but they do not bother about the important detail in the small finds. Yet

professional archaeologists are in the usual good pal's club, and rarely criticise each other for their negligence, failings and sheer vandalism. This is anything but science.

It is time archaeology in the field was banned until all the outstanding reports are published and the countless shelves full of relics in museum basements have been properly inspected and catalogued, dated and published by several experts, not just one. Indeed, tyro archaeologists ought to check these standard entries, as part of their training, so that there might be a chance that misdated artefacts can be discovered. There is little specific in the Holy Word that can be upheld by archaeology. Believers and biblicists have to make an excuse for almost everything that is found, but do it without a qualm. Chaos suits biblicists in particular because nothing certain can then rock their leaky little coracles. They never wonder at the apparent perversity of God, or consider that men who were cleverer than they are have fooled them.

The Persian period is territory in the historical map of Palestine that no one cares to explore, and have actually deliberately hidden:

Archaeologists skipped over this time. They rarely published pottery from this period. Sometimes they did not even bother saving their finds, instead digging down to the earlier periods that dealt either with the emergence of Israel in Canaan or with the so-called golden era of David and Solomon.

Amy Dockser Marcus, *Rewriting the Bible*

Only from about 1980 did it enter the consciousness of biblical scholars that the Persian period was at all important, and now they are fighting a rearguard action against the painful truth—the Persians created Judaism! The biblicists, who never once think it is remarkable that invisible shepherds could have written histories, psalms and odes, suddenly think it is impossible that the Persian and Persian colonists could have written anything.

Biblicists suffer from a desire to date everything as early as they can feasibly entertain, and often whether it was feasible or not, and seem not to understand that in the second half of its existence, the Persian empire was effectively a new Babylon. Darius II was half Babylonian and preferred Babylon to Susa and Ecbatana. Ostraca meant as dockets for produce destined for Babylon are not necessarily from the period of the Babylonian empire, but might be later. Examination of Persian period constructions shows them with natural enough objects like wine and olive presses, loom weights, tools and pots said to characterise the Babylonian period, once it was evident enough in the ground. Some Greek artefacts are found among them.

The Babylonians administered Judah for 50 years and the Persians for 200. Which should have made the more significant mark? The Persians made the most significant mark in inventing Judaism, but also hid this from the world by inventing the Jewish scriptures, which Jews and Christians have believed ever since, despite the idea being as full of holes as a colander.

Archaeologists noted that a string of fortresses appeared in Judah and in the Negev in the fifth century, and the walls of Jerusalem were repaired at just this time too. The reason seems clear. Egypt rebelled in mid-century with Greek support, and even some Canaanite support as well—the seaport Dor was involved—such as Egyptian sympathisers in Yehud. Evidence is that ten similar fortresses were built in commanding positions, were maintained for a few decades and then were abandoned when the danger was past. The Egyptian sympathisers will be depicted in the Jewish scriptures as the Am ha Eretz, the native inhabitants of Yehud who



opposed the incoming colonists when they ignored their legitimate rights of possession of the land. Nehemiah in this somewhat confused story had official approval to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, doubtless as a consequence of the revolt.

Ezra, the great hero of post-exilic Judaism, the bible makes out is almost 200 years old when he arrived back in his putative homeland sometime between 450 and 400 BC. His father was killed by Nebuchadrezar's general, Nebuzaradan, in 587 BC—according to the biblical account! Such an error does not invalidate the historical reality of Ezra, but it shows he is already being mythologized. He is being made to fit the paradigm of exile and return when the reality was colonisation by deported people. The intended reader in antiquity would not be expected to know that Ezra lived 200 years after the occupation of Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezar.

## **Conclusion**

The biblical picture of ancient Israel is contrary to any image of ancient Palestinian society from contemporary or local sources, and cannot be reconciled with the historical past of the region. Pre-Hellenistic history of the region cannot be constructed from the Jewish scriptures. It is a fictional history that refers little to things that happened or existed.

From an historian's point of view, ancient Israel is a monstrous creature, sprung out of the fantasy of biblical historiographers and their modern paraphrasers.

*Niels-Pieter Lemche*

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?**  
**The Pentateuch; Expanding Deuteronomy**

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### **Persian Propaganda**

Professor Alberto Soggin declares that the outlook of the myths of the *Pentateuch*, the *Former Prophets* and the *Major Prophets* was that of people in Mesopotamia who were emigrating to the new land (to them) of Canaan where they would meet opposition from the natives sympathetic to the Egyptians.

The Patriarchal and Mosaic sagas in the *Pentateuch* serve as a metaphor for this colonization, depicted as a “return” from “exile”, and to form a basis for a new interpretation of cult practices like Passover, the names of people in different taxation areas and the covenant with God at Sinai. It also contains the laws laid down by various phases of “returners”, some poetic and some hortatory material. The Pentateuchal literature can only be understood in relation to the cult (C R North) because it was written at least in essence to justify the cult by the Persian administrators of the fifth century BC. Some of the Canaanites of Palestine before the “return” might have worshipped a Baal called Yehouah but no honest scholar would pretend that the cult was the same. The only common feature will have been the name of the god.

The population of the Persian district of Yehud was only about 20,000 even though two million left Egypt, we deduce from *Exodus*. Even if other places besides Judah were settled, it is a huge discrepancy. What is the purpose of this exaggeration in the scriptures? It is to show what the scriptures always show, that the Jews have been constant sinners against the true god, who had punished them by reducing them to a remnant. The Jewish “returners” were to be made dependent on the Persian conception of god for whom the Persian king was the earthly representative. That they previously worshipped Canaanite Baals and Egyptian deities was attributed to apostasy from the true God, which is why they had been reduced. Thus the Persians used religion as a factor in their foreign policy, and that is why today we have Judaism and Christianity.

The disparate group of twelve tribes uniting in a religion built around the temple reflected only the disparate groups of people sent as “returners” by the Persian king to found a unity around Ahuramazda, renamed as the local god, Yehouah. *Isaiah* 41:18ff speaks of a “Second Exodus” just as there is a “second temple”. The truth is that here “second” means “first” because the story given to the emigreés was that they were “returning” to resume proper worship of their god. Most were not, they were new settlers, themselves uprooted as the biblical Israelites were by the Assyrians and the Jews by the Babylonians. Even if any of them had had Canaanite ancestors, they were not personally returning because they had been about three generations in a foreign country. So, they were merely “returning” in a propaganda sense, with a mission given them by the Persian king and with a god in the mould of the Persian God of Heaven.

Biblicists, like Nelson Glueck and W F Albright, ignored the propagandist nature of the stories of the Patriarchs and persisted in trying to tie them into history. They could find nothing convincing that did, but the Jewish and Christian churches are never short of finances to pay willing dupes to lie for God.

If ancient propaganda is to be truth then Christians and Jews can make it true simply by saying so as often and loudly as possible, until more reasoned views are drowned out. Discoveries are ignored—discredited not by evidence but by sheer weight of pious opinion—and forgotten for the time being. Each time someone realizes, points in amazement at the dishonesty and highlights the arguments counter to these religions, but each time the truth is overlaid afresh with layers of pious defaecation from the holy Joes with easy livings to defend. These truths have to be rediscovered every generation, but now mass communication offers the chance of people taking notice.

Though the Biblicists know better than most people, being scholars and even archaeologists, they persist in using expressions that they know to be at best questionable—the “Patriarchal Age”, the “Exodus”, the “United Monarchy” and the “Davidic Empire”. This really is dishonesty.

Even honest scholars like Professor Soggin can say we must take the utmost care in using the material “without adopting a skeptical attitude” to it. Religious apologists always say this, but knowledge advances by being skeptical, not by being gullible. Skepticism invites inquiry and inquiry can prove a view right or wrong. Scientific inquiry demands skepticism, but Christians will not be shown to be wrong. Biblical scholars say: “We will not look! We do not want to see! We do not want to know!”.

Even worse! the Albrightians are saying: “We know but we will not admit it!” Biblical scholars know already that none of the scriptures is true, if taken to be the word of God and not the instrument of Persian foreign policy, and the policies of the later Greeks and Maccabees. That is why they resist any proper scientific investigation and put fellow Biblicists in charge of every crucial excavation and inquiry to confuse or even destroy damning evidence. Rumours abound from students engaged in biblical archaeological fieldwork about important evidence being removed from the site and disappearing or being deposited somewhere irrelevant. Is it the Hebrew God who needs this crookery, or professional Jews and Christians comfortably picking the pockets of gullible innocents?

## **The Elements of the Pentateuch**

The *Pentateuch*—the first five books of the Bible—is traditionally said to have been written by none other than Moses himself. Doubtless believers will still believe this myth too, but it is manifestly untrue by the evidence of the *Pentateuch* itself. In *Deuteronomy* 34:7, anyone can read of the death of Moses, and the fact that he never got to enter the Promised Land. They “buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is”. Then we are told:

Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses. (*Dt* 34:10)

It should not need to be said that Moses cannot describe his own death and burial and, if he could, he could remind people where he was laid down! The final point shows that the true author was writing such a long time later that he thought it worth commenting that no one like Moses had ever been known since. These excerpts are from the appendix to *Deuteronomy* that is unquestionably later than the main part of the book, but the book is also late in the supposed historical sequence of the bible because it is from the time of Ezra in the Persian period. The fact that the “Exile” is also alluded to in *Deuteronomy* proves that the *Pentateuch*—at least in its present recension—is post-exilic. Scholars such as S H Hooke in *Peake’s Commentary* unanimously accept

that *Genesis* was written in the Persian period to explain why Yehouah (or at first El) had chosen Israel.

The *Pentateuch* was not written by Moses, but by different writers compiling some older material, instructions by Persian officials setting up the theocracy of Judea, and later priests influenced by the Greeks. The Persian instructions were the central portion of *Deuteronomy*. The older material consisted of Mesopotamian myths, elements of Syrian myths, and folklore. The priests added detailed laws to do with temple worship (*Leviticus* is a manual of temple sacrifice), genealogies to give credence to their authority, and bogus history to justify the temple cultus from a putative antiquity. It all showed the Israelites as serial apostates from the worship of Yehouah, their new God of Heaven under the Persians, and a lucrative meal ticket for the priests.

Yet Jeremiah and the Psalmist, for example, contradict the *Pentateuch* utterly regarding temple sacrifice, writing that Yehouah said:

For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.

Jer 7:22

The Psalmist replies:

Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire. Mine ears hast thou opened. Burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.

Ps 40:6

These were writing in opposition to the temple cult—which must therefore have already been established—not necessarily in the Persian period but possibly in the time of the southern Greek kings, the Ptolemies. Note that Jeremiah travels to Egypt, and that many of the psalms have the hallmark of the Essenes who also had Egyptians connexions.

Whoever did write these books were writing in the knowledge that the Israelite state existed as a settled community and the Canaanites no longer lived in the hill country, yet the *Pentateuch* ends before the land had supposedly been taken by conquest.

- ❑ As Abram reaches Shechem we read: “The Canaanite was then in the land”, (*Gen* 12:6) an expression that presumes they no longer were, and so must have been written much later.
- ❑ When Abram’s and Lot’s herdmen were quarrelling, we read: “The Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land”, (*Gen* 13:7) again implying they no longer were. If Perizzites were Persians, then the author is in Hellenistic times.
- ❑ Dan appears twice (*Gen* 14:14, *Dt* 34:1) in the *Pentateuch* even though the tribes had not yet settled in Canaan. Elsewhere the bible explains that before the supposed conquest, Dan was Laish (*Jg* 18:29).
- ❑ If laws implies a settled, agricultural society (*Ex* 23:10-11, *Lev* 19:19), then Moses could not have written them. Furthermore, the Royalty Law of *Deuteronomy* 17:14-15 applies to a state with a king, presuming a monarchy, probably the Maccabees, in fact.
- ❑ Abel Mizraim east of the Jordan is called “beyond Jordan” (*Gen* 50:10), implying an author living in Palestine already.

## Compositional Hypotheses

Translations of the bible hide the fact that God is not just called God, but has several names:

- ❑ the most common is “Yehouah” (YHWH, Yahweh, Jehovah, and now Jarvay) with about 7000 occurrences;
- ❑ “Adonai” (Lord, properly “My Lords”, a plural of majesty) which is the common substitute for Yehouah because the latter is ineffable;
- ❑ “Elohim” (~3500), literally, “Gods” but declared another “plural of majesty” to justify its singular translation, and used by the authors of the Priests’ Code;
- ❑ the combination “Yehouah Elohim” is common and translated as “Lord God”, an obvious mistranslation when “Yehouah of the Gods” looks literally more correct;
- ❑ El is the Canaanite word for their high god but also more generally is taken to mean a god;
- ❑ “El Elyon” is “God the Highest”, implying other gods, and apparently a Phoenician name of God, according to Eusebius citing Philo;
- ❑ El Shaddai is translated as God Almighty, but no one knows what it means, but the few clues suggest it is the name of a mountain or storm god;
- ❑ “Yehouah Sabaoth” is “Yehouah of the Hosts (of heaven)”, also implying other gods, and is the word favoured in the early Persian works of the bible.

Frank Delitzsch thought the first books of the bible were stitched together by an editor from earlier sources called, after their name for God or style, J, E, P and D. Wellhausen took up this idea and championed it but putting the Priestly stage at the end instead of the Deuteronomist, and not first where it had been thought to be from the biblical story. Scholars squabbled about whether the first source was E or J. The different names for God must have had a purpose, at least at first. El and Elohim, implying El, must have been competing names with Yehouah. Both had to be retained to satisfy competing factions.

J saw God as a man, so that man could be formed in His image. This anthropomorphic God closes the door of the ark (*Gen* 7:16), visits the Tower of Babel (*Gen* 11:5), takes walks in gardens, and so on. The author E has God revealing himself not directly but through the “angel of the Lord” (21:17 and 22:11), through dreams and interpretations (*Gen* 40:8) and through his prophets, typified by Moses (*Num* 12:6-8). The Elohist only begins with Abraham. The author P combined the books of J and E (or used a prior combination of these books), adding new material. P has a much more impersonal grand God, and was more concerned with points of doctrine and ritual than narrative. P is mainly lists of laws and presupposes an active temple. D is the author of *Deuteronomy* and has a consistent style of his own that some say can be detected throughout the histories. Much of it, though, is explained by the overall purpose of the Persians in presenting these laws and books—to persuade the Hebrews to be loyal and obedient to God through His king, the Shahanshah.

There is a modern preference for the view that much of the Yehouistic material was written later than originally thought, implying an absurdly long period of oral and written transmission of the Pentateuchal narratives for them to be genuinely old. Julius Wellhausen thought the editing process was completed in the Persian period. There were later changes surely in the histories and prophets, and Exodus/Numbers is also late. More and more *Old Testament* texts are considered postexilic, and their historical allusions are not reliable.

The stories that were put together at the start of *Genesis* were fragments of older myths used to explain God's purpose in history and to place Israel central to it. None of them are Canaanite—all are Mesopotamian.

None of the myths [of *Genesis* 1-11] has been shown to be of distinctively Hebrew origin, while most of them, the Flood story in particular, are of Mesopotamian origin.

S H Hooke, *Peake's Commentary*

The aim is always to show the Jews as disobedient and rebellious toward God and needing to seek perfect righteousness to escape retribution. Syrian myths such as those of the Patriarchs were added. Mainly they were originally unrelated stories, some of which were associated with different local shrines and doubtless the people who worshipped at them. An editor has merged them as a genealogical assembly ultimately to promote the idea of the unity of Israel.

Noth thought that there was a common source behind J and E which he called G (*Grundlage*). Since J and E seem to represent two factions, he could be right, because they were telling essentially the same story but could not agree on who was the High God. The different factions wrote them in their own preferred way and the compromising editor has merged them judiciously to satisfy both.

This suggests that the beginning of *Genesis*, not including the Priestly additions, is early. Rolf Rendtorff believes that large units of composition agglomerated already soon after *Genesis* was composed:

- ☐ the Primordial Unit,
- ☐ the Patriarchal Unit.

From *Genesis* 12 the Patriarchs are shown as arriving from Mesopotamia instructed by God to set up proper worship of Him and begin the redemption of mankind through obedience to God's commands. *Genesis* 37 to 50 give the story of Joseph as an explanation of how Israel got into slavery to Egypt in preparation for yet another "return" when Moses takes the Israelites on an Exodus from Egypt back to Canaan. The connecting together of all the units of *Genesis* was undertaken by an editor who inserted chronological signposts (*Gen* 16:16; 17:24) and theological passages (*Gen* 17; 35:9-13).

## Torah

The *Pentateuch* is the Jewish law or *Torah*, often defined as "teaching" rather than "law", but S Dean McBride Jr, in an essay in *Old Testament Interpretation*, is much more precise:

Torah is closer in meaning to decree than to edifying discourse, mandatory instruction rather than insightful counsel...

Baruch Spinoza in 1670 AD announced that Ezra was Moses (*Tractatus theologico-politicus*), and he attributed the *Pentateuch* to the Persian minister. The reaction of the authorities of the Church was to place the *Tractatus* on the Papal Index of proscribed books in 1677 AD. Leibnitz and Newton invented the calculus at the same time and now it is taught to every schoolchild, yet the same child is still taught the myth of Moses as



if it were history. That over 300 years later Christians and Jews are no wiser goes to prove the might of religious ignorance.

As in *Genesis*, large units can be seen in the rest of the *Pentateuch*:

- ☐ Moses and Exodus (*Ex* 1-18),
- ☐ Sinai (*Ex* 19-24),
- ☐ the journey to Moab (*Ex* 16-18 and *Num* 10:11-36:13),
- ☐ *Deuteronomy*,

The conquest in *Joshua* and the early parts of *Judges* could perhaps be added to this scheme. Five covenants are found within this framework:

1. with Noah (*Gen* 9:9-17),
2. with Abraham (*Gen* 17:1-14 (cf 15:1-17)),
3. with Moses (*Ex* 19:1-34:28),
4. with Phinehas (*Num* 25:11-13),
5. the original and proper one, upon which the others were modelled, *Deuteronomy* 29:1-32:47).

Each covenant has attached laws, so the later priests introduced retrogressively new covenants to impress new laws. The expressions of these laws are:

1. the Deuteronomic Code or the Law of Moses (*Dt* 4:44-28:68)—the original law laid down by Ezra for the Persian king,
2. the ethical decalogue (*Ex* 20:2-17 (cf *Ex* 34:28; *Dt* 4:13; 5:6-27)),
3. the Book of the Covenant (*Ex* 20:22-23:33 (cf *Ex* 24:7)),
4. the description of the tabernacle and its rites (*Ex* 25:1-31:17) and a plan of how they were implemented ((*Ex* 35:1-40:33),
5. the cultic decalogue or dodecalogue (*Ex* 34:11-17),
6. the Priestly code (*Lev* 1-26) which includes the Holiness code, possibly a somewhat earlier stratum,

The philological problems of *The Decalogue* are considerable, Garbini tells us. Of the three versions in the bible the one that is least altered and therefore likely to be the earliest is that in *Deuteronomy* 5:6-21. It presupposes a sedentary not a nomadic life, and therefore could not have been devised by migrating tribes with no settled home. *The Decalogue* was produced in a settled society, contradicting the biblical myth, and, right from the outset, it is in conflict with the worship of gods other than Yehouah, called idolatry. Since the native Canaanite religion was a polytheistic idolatry, the religion of Yehouah certainly fits the idea that it was imposed. As Garbini puts it:

The initial part of the *Decalogue* becomes completely relevant if seen in the perspective of a religious reform which originated in Palestine and which with its monotheistic message tended towards a conscious and total revolt against the Phœnician religion...

Why the reform had to originate in Palestine, Garbini does not explain. It originated in Persia.

The whole structure of *Exodus/Numbers* is set in a large chiasm (a symmetrical entry and return compositional structure) about *Exodus* 33 where God promises to be with Israel, which stretches from *Exodus* 14 to *Numbers* 32. It is a cycle from success through apostasy to covenant to renewed success in which at the centre the covenant is instituted and then the cult. *Exodus* and *Numbers* are therefore all one composition.

The legal parts of the *Pentateuch* start at *Exodus* 19. Then we have definitions of *Torah*:

- ❑ a divine edict: For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (*Isa* 2:3).
- ❑ a formal judicial decision: According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do. Thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left (*Dt* 17:11).
- ❑ a sacred atoning ritual: Likewise this is the law of the trespass offering: it is most holy (*Lev* 7:1).
- ❑ a priestly instruction: Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law (*Hag* 2:11).

The law demands immediate attention and the faithful obedience of those to whom it was addressed, if prosperity and not disaster is to ensue:

- ❑ Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee. Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein. For then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success (*Josh* 1:7-8).
- ❑ Yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets (*2 Kg* 17:13).
- ❑ My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me. Seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children (*Hos* 4:6).
- ❑ Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an eagle against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law (*Hos* 8:1).

The *Torah* was promulgated publicly, that everyone might know it, and implemented with the force of any law under the royal auspices of the state:

- ❑ When all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law. And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it (*Dt* 31:11-13).
- ❑ Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner

(*Neh* 8:18).

- And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God, and teach ye them that know them not. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment (*Ezra* 7:25-26).

The reason for all this is plain. Who is addressing Ezra in the last of these citations? God? Obviously not. It is the Persian king! He begins, saying (*Ezra* 7:13), “I make a decree”. The law was imposed upon the Jews by their Persian masters by decree and they were obliged to learn it. As we would still say today: “Ignorance of the law is no defence”.

## Deuteronomy

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, W M L de Wette, following S Jerome long before, identified the laws in *Deuteronomy* as “the law” and proposed that it was the *Book of the Covenant* found by Hilkiah in the reign of Josiah (2 *Kg* 22:3-23:25). The laws mentioned in the *Pentateuch* were the laws of a settled agrarian society and could not have been formulated by wanderers in transit.

Julius Wellhausen in *Prolegomenon* told everybody that the law of Moses was introduced as the basis of Judaism—a post-exilic cult—not a millennium before as the basis of a fictional ancient Israel. *Deuteronomy* 12-26 were laws imposed by the Persians when they deported colonists to Yehud to begin a temple state for financial reasons. One of its main intentions was to centralize authority and worship in Jerusalem, and this not just for the small local population, but for all the “nations” of Abarnahara.

Several references within *Deuteronomy* itself mention the dispersion among the nations whence the Jews returned, though they are among the parts added by later editors to frame the laws.

And the Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you.

*Dt* 4:27

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee.

*Dt* 30:1

That then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee.

*Dt* 30:3

The first mention of Moses after the exile in the biblical chronology is in *Nehemiah* 8 where we find, the “Book of the Law of Moses”, when it was publicly read to the people at the feast of tabernacles. The prayer of the Levites which follows, and is a later composition containing insertions from other books of the *Pentateuch*, is

mainly from *Deuteronomy*.

Moshe Weinfeld, in *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (1972), noted that the structure and content of *Deuteronomy* was of the form of the ancient near eastern vassalage treaties. This is so near the knuckle for professional Jews and Christians that they had to thrash around for an explanation. It was that the royal court of Israel had a school of professional court scribes—sort of proto-Christians, you might say—trained in secular humanism and wisdom, and also vassalage treaties! They promoted *Deuteronomy* in the time of Josiah as a secular law to counter the influence of the temple cult. Aren't these "scholars" amazing? Doubtless this might still be heard in certain high school RI classes, but it is manifestly bunkum.

Why, though, should books of law contain a lot of narrative? Was it always thus? It was not. The central, legal, parts of *Deuteronomy* were the original law, perhaps with some parts now transferred into *Exodus* and some lost altogether.

The bulk of *Deuteronomy* is a compilation of laws. A framework based on the departing of the aged Moses has been added, but it does not further the story of the fulfilment of the promise of land. Some scholars think they can detect a Deuteronomistic hand at places in the *Tetrateuch*, though Noth could not see it in *Genesis*. Rendtorff could see the Deuteronomists in all four Tetrateuchal books. A likely candidate is the "Book of the Covenant" in *Exodus* 19-24, where Moses should be called Ezra and the whole affair set on Mount Zion where the Persians laid on a show for the gullible Canaanites (Israelites) making sure they were not allowed near to see the preparations and trickery by keeping them at a distance. The introductory review of Moses in *Deuteronomy* naturally refers back to this spectacle but says it was at Horeb, not Sinai.

The trouble is the usual one of multiple editing. Douglas Knight tells us frankly that the evidence is overwhelming that the biblical texts are not by any single author but have mostly been reworked by successive editors with "distinctive styles, language, perspective, themes and intentions". These editors often recast their material and rearranged them according to their own plans. In short, the books have been partly mixed up. Editors could have moved a chunk of *Deuteronomy* to what they thought they saw as a better place in one of the books they were preparing, and, naturally, these were men who would use the didactic Deuteronomistic style when they wanted to, either simply because it was appropriate in context or to give the passage a gravitas they needed, for *Deuteronomy* at first was seen as God's law.

Noth thought that P was restricted to *Genesis* to *Numbers* with only a trace in *Deuteronomy* concerning the death of Moses (*Dt* 32:48-52;34:1;5;7-9). Noth had his own theory of the Deuteronomistic history beginning with *Deuteronomy* and extending to *2 Kings*. In fact, there are additions to *Joshua* that might be from the Priestly school. The Deuteronomistic history, according to Noth, has a distinctive use of language and a distinctive style. The author inserted homiletic speeches by the chief participants at certain points Joshua (*Josh* 1;23), Samuel (*1 Sam* 12), and Solomon (*1 Kg* 8:14ff), and conjunctive notes in a similar didactic style. The beginning of *Deuteronomy*, Noth took to be the introduction to the whole work.

*Deuteronomy* was the original law and also began the Deuteronomistic history, so any added laws had to be added before *Deuteronomy*, out of necessity and to give the new laws invented by subsequent priests the authority of age, the foundation history obviously having to precede the history culled from the Assyrian annals of the kings. Van Seters saw D as primary, followed by J and then P (DJP), E being an illusion. There seems to

have been a genuine conflict over the name of God, so E is perhaps not so illusory, but otherwise, Van Seters is correct, as he often is. Though Hooke tells us that much of P has been shown to be early, it is surely the last layer of legal tradition added.

The promise of land pervades much of the *Pentateuch* except the Primordial unit, and Rentdorff sees it as being attached to *Deuteronomy*. In *Deuteronomy*, although it concludes the *Pentateuch*, its narrative sections do not advance the position of the wandering tribes. They are on the plains of Moab at the end of *Numbers* and they are still there after Moses's speeches at the end of *Deuteronomy*. If the promise of land is to be fulfilled in this unit then *Joshua* should be added making the *Pentateuch* into a *Hexateuch*. Yet, *Deuteronomy* is the odd book in the *Pentateuch* and looks as though it should not be there, in which case the *Pentateuch* is reduced to a *Tetrateuch*. This classification supports Noth's idea that *Deuteronomy* is properly the beginning of the Deuteronomic history, not a part of the *Pentateuch* really.

This ambiguous quality of *Deuteronomy* places it at the centre of interpretation of the Jewish scriptures. If biblical history were sound, then *Deuteronomy* is an anachronism added where it is, because far more detailed laws precede it and it seems strange that an editor should have added the older looking *Deuteronomy* rather than altering the more refined laws, if necessary. It follows that *Deuteronomy* was the earliest of these books, in fact, but that it could not be moved because the Deuteronomic history had been written based on it. The other laws and sagas therefore had to be added before it. D Petersen says that the *Tetrateuch* was written as a prologue to the Deuteronomic history. The order of composition implied is therefore *Deuteronomy*, DH and then the *Tetrateuch*.

Rudolf Smend could not see the uniformity of style that Noth saw, and claimed that its unevenness and diversity suggested multiple authors and editors. Smend saw an editor with a particular interest in the law and Walter Dietrich saw one interested in the prophets and whose rhetoric is that of *Jeremiah*. Both are probably among the interests of the original authors, but later editors are also certain. Many scholars though persist in believing de Wette's idea that the book found by Hilkiah is *Deuteronomy*. They cannot accept the subtlety of the biblical authors. Were it not for this clever touch, one wonders whether any such idea could be held. Without it, few scholars would be ready to believe that *Deuteronomy* made more sense in the seventh century than in the fifth. Engnell seems to have no doubt that its proper date is the fifth century and he points to the exilic references, which he plainly does not accept as making any sense as interpolations. Biblical editors tended to want their compilation to seem older than it was, not younger.

The homiletic or didactic style of *Deuteronomy* shows it was intended to be read out by the priests to the people on the occasions when they met for service. This was August Klostermann's view, and Georges Minette de Tillesse pointed out that the singular and plural used in it showed that the message was being redirected from a singular recipient, the High Priest, to the body of the people—all Israel—via the congregation.

The verbal characteristics and concerns by which the Deuteronomists might be recognized are:

- ☐ **Idols.** Following, worshipping foreign gods, burning incense to them, burning or passing a son or daughter through the fire, abomination, and detestable things, used of Canaanite gods and idols.
- ☐ **Central.** The site or city that Yehouah will choose, his chosen, and making his name live there.
- ☐ **Captivity.** Ransome, house of bondage, the iron furnace, choosing to be a people to him, a strong

hand and an outstretched arm.

- ❑ **One God.** Know that Yehouah alone is God, in the heaven above and in the earth below, you alone are the God.
- ❑ **Obedience.** Following, serving, fearing, loving Yehouah, walking in the way(s) of Yehouah, with all the heart and with all the soul, doing what is right or good in the eyes of Yehouah, doing what is evil in the eyes of Yehouah, turning away or aside, keeping commandments, testimonies, judgements.
- ❑ **The Land.** The land which Yehouah, your God, is giving you as an inheritance, dispossessing nations, the good land or ground, being strong and resolute.
- ❑ **Reward.** Prolonging days in order that Yehouah may bless you, living (prosperously) or (prosperous) life, was incensed, destroying, punishing, putting to an end, uprooting.
- ❑ **Fulfilment.** Establishing the word of Yehouah, as at this day, behold I will bring evil upon.
- ❑ **David.** For the sake of David, my (his) servant, doing that which is right as David... or not as David...
- ❑ **Rhetoric.** Hear O Israel, pouring, laying upon, filling with innocent blood, know therefore.

Of course, it stands to reason that later editors or even writers could have used the same ringing phrases, so they cannot be used mechanically to distinguish different hands, but where they are not used the tradition is likely to be independent—either from elsewhere or an earlier period. *Job* and *Proverbs* are plainly quite independent works in the bible, showing almost nothing in common with the rest of the books. The Deuteronomistic editors assume Jerusalem is the centre of the cult, but *Deuteronomy* is just establishing it. Thus there is no Zion philosophy in *Deuteronomy*, no reference to the Holiness code, no mention of David, and little else attributable to P. It precedes them. Some scholars see a lot in common with the prophets. It is because they were close contemporaries and had a similar purpose—achieving Persian foreign policy in Yehud. The only doubtful bits of later editorial in *Deuteronomy* are in the topping and tailing. So the earliest Deuteronomistic editors follow *Deuteronomy* by some time, probably several decades at least. The last editors were probably centuries later.

The importance of the Deuteronomistic history to the religions of the Jews and Christians is expressed honestly by Douglas Knight:

If one removed DtrH as a source, our history of Israel from 1200 to 550 BC would be so sparse as to be unrecognizable—and probably unusable for modern religious, moral or other ideological ends as well.

John Van Seters examined all the historical traditions of the ANE and disputed the idea that any extended histories or collections of shorter historical works could have preceded the Persian period. All that existed then, were folk tales and lists of chronicles, kings and administrators. Earlier Professor E Voguelin had written:

The concern for the past as the paradigmatic record of God's way with men, extending over a period of more than 1000 years could hardly translate itself into practice without a considerable apparatus of both personnel and material installations, for preserving this enormous body of traditions not only mechanically but with the necessary intelligence and erudition.

(*Israel and Revelation* 1956)

Much bigger countries like Assyria could not provide this intelligent apparatus, it seems, but a tiny country of 60,000 shepherds could. Doubtless it is another one of God's miracles, but Voguelin is really saying it is



impossible. The Deuteronomic History must have stood out as the equal of Herodotus and Thucydides, but supposedly preceded them by hundreds of years! It is certainly later than Herodotus even in its inception, and much of it was written by Hellenistic writers.

Giovanni Garbini has observed on the peculiar absence of monumental inscriptions in the hill country of Palestine. He thinks all early monuments were destroyed by people with a vested interest in preserving the mythical history of the bible. The Maccabees might have been the most likely candidates. What is interesting though is that Jews and Christians have conspired ever since in this one endeavour—to disguise the true history of the Levant. Now scarcely anything remains written from any of it, even Phœnicia—and Phœnicians were not illiterate. The history of the Persian empire and the pre-history of Iran is almost blank by comparison with Egypt where Moses is supposed to have come from. Was there a rush to find out about Persia when Spinoza made his discovery? As we saw, the book was blacklisted. And we are taught that Stalin re-wrote history... as a student priest, he was doubtless taught how to do it properly.

### Copying Herodotus?

Jan-Wim Wesselius of Amsterdam thinks the structure of the history of Israel from the patriarch Abraham to the arrival in Canaan and the conquest of it in the book of Joshua, derives from the *Histories* of Herodotus of Halicarnassus. The parallel is not merely literary but in the framework of the narrative. The genealogy of the family of the patriarchs matches that of the Persian royal family in Herodotus, especially in connexion with their contacts with the land where the great campaign of both works starts, Lydia in the *Histories* and Egypt in the *Bible*.

Application of the *Histories'* narrative framework, for Xerxes's campaign against Greece, to Israel campaigning to enter Canaan, automatically leads to an account like the Bible's. For Israel to get to Canaan in a great campaign from another continent, Egypt was the only starting place. The reason why the Israelites were in Egypt then needed explaining.

The basis of this is found in the *Histories* in the early life of Cyrus the Great, Xerxes's grandfather through his mother Atossa—the two dreams describing his future power, the family members wanting to kill him, his being hidden from them for a number of years, the fulfilment of the dreams as a result of the actions meant for preventing it, and his attaining power over Lydia, the land where the great campaign is to start in the time of his grandson. The contact of Joseph's great-grandfather Abram with Egypt in *Genesis* 12 quite naturally derives from the contact of Cyaxares, Cyrus' great-grandfather, with the Lydians. Joseph is Cyrus. The episodes of Exodus, journey through the Wilderness and Conquest issue autonomously from this literary dependence, and are non-historical. The Exodus as recounted in the Bible is most likely a literary-religious fiction.

The derivation of the structure of one work from another one is a well-attested literary phenomenon, the classic example being Virgil's *Aeneid* and Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The first half of the *Aeneid* reflects the *Odyssey*, the second part the *Iliad*. Within the Jewish scriptures, the structural similarity between *Nehemiah*, *Ezra* and *Daniel* is notable.

It is incredible, as Wesselius says himself, that nobody has accepted the literary link even though scholars have noted that the theme of both works is the same—a tremendous campaign of millions to conquer a rich and

fruitful land on another continent, starting with the crossing of the water between the two continents as if on dry land. Mandell and Freedman, Whybray and Van Seters, and recently Flemming Nielsen, found many agreements between Herodotus and the *History of the Patriarchs, Exodus and Conquest*, but all have been blind to a direct literary dependence.

J Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch. An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (1992) knew of the link, but pooh-poohed it on the grounds that the description of military events leading to the decisive defeat of Xerxes occupies three of the nine books of the *Histories*, but nothing like it is found in the *Pentateuch*. It is a case often used by apologists that what is not exactly matching is not matching at all. Wesselius has shown that the scriptural *History of the Patriarchs, Exodus and Conquest* reflects the *Histories*, like a mirror. Both have the structure:

1. Origins.
2. Ordinary history.
3. Great campaign.

The importance of this is that the date of this part of the *Pentateuch* must be after 445 BC, the earliest possible year of the *Histories*, but before most of the Jewish scriptures suddenly emerged around 250 BC. It suggests the bible was composed between late Persian and early Hellenistic times. Wesselius highlights the *Passover Letter*, from Elephantine of 419 BC, requiring the Jewish community there to celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread. He links the letter with Nehemiah because its author Hananiah could be Nehemiah's brother Hanani (*Neh* 1:2 and 7:2). If the letter signifies the same reforms being introduced by the Persians via Ezra and Nehemiah in Yehud, the *History of the Patriarchs, Exodus and Conquest* will have been published about 420 BC to accompany the changes being introduced. A later rewriting using Herodotus in the time of the Ptolemies nevertheless seems more likely.

The festival of Passover is older than the writing of the *Pentateuch*. It is mentioned, B Porten and A Yardeni note in *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt 4: Ostraca and Assorted Inscriptions*, on what are probably early fifth-century ostraca from Elephantine, but it was probably the earlier seasonal or fertility festival, not the one associated with the Exodus. Its association with a liberation from Egypt (not necessarily an exodus) will have been in these Persian times, and explanation of the right way to celebrate the new form of Passover would be expected when the change was being introduced, but association with an exodus must be more recent. The Canaanites must have been in the habit of sacrificing their first born sons on the day of Passover. The original Passover story, which preceded any notion of the Israelites being Egyptian refugees, included this custom of killing the first born. When the exodus story was devised, the sacrificial victims were made into Egyptians rather than Israelites to remove an embarrassment, and the aborted sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, with the substitute of a ram was anachronistically inserted to signify the earlier end of it. The original custom might still have been remembered by some at the time of the Passion of Jesus, the first born son(!) of God, influencing how it was recorded, even though it was simply a judicial murder.

Wesselius believes that many of the apparent contradictions in the *Deuteronomistic History* are deliberate, a literary device. The author deliberately indicated uncertainty about vital episodes such as the early history of mankind and of the world, the entire complex of Exodus, Wilderness journey and Conquest, and events during the early monarchy in Israel, by means of giving alternative versions, different accounts of certain passages,

the different names used for God, and so on, and ultimately causing a collapse of the narrative.

Such devices might offer a sort of reconciliation of two viewpoints, or deliberately create ambiguity when otherwise two views would be in conflict or one would have to be discarded, to avoid non-acceptance or external conflict. Especially when the conflict is resolved by collapsing the story, it is meant to show the story is not historical but mythology. The absence of such collapsing of the narrative in the history of the two kingdoms suggests the author saw it as more historical.

The Samaritans, as the Israelites, were the main target of the Deuteronomist and they must have rejected the *Deuteronomistic History* at some later stage.

## Ethnicity

E Theodore Mullen, Jr in *Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries* (1993), sees the *Deuteronomistic History* as phony. The *Deuteronomistic History* is an ethnohistory—an idealized past for the formation and maintenance of a distinct ethnic identity in the present. He thinks a literate elite in Babylon imagined a new community and gave it a history via ancient and invented traditions c 550 BC. In this he was correct, but he was wrong to think Jews conceived of it—it was the Persians—and he was about 100 years too early.

Ethnic identity dominates and shapes the *Pentateuch*. In a second book, *Ethnic Myths and Pentateuchal Foundations: A New Approach to the Formation of the Pentateuch* (1997), Mullen says the *Pentateuch* was written for an audience of contending groups to unify Israelite ethnic identity. Mullen argues *Genesis to Numbers* was composed in the Persian period as a prologue to the previously composed *Deuteronomistic History*. Mullen is seeing clearly, but not clearly enough.

F V Greifenhagen in a paper in *JRS* also observes that much of the Hebrew Bible, including the *Pentateuch*, serves to establish a particular Israelite ethnic identity, based on a mythology of common origins and kinship. Ethnicity is most important on the margin of states. The best time for the elaboration of Israelite ethnicity would have been during one of the Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Persian empires. A phony ethnicity will project an ideal norm that will not necessarily coincide with society. Ethnic boundaries are often rigidly defined circumscribing contact with those considered “others”, but, in reality, movement across, or deviation from, these boundaries often occurs.

The scriptures plainly try to separate the Canaanites from the incomers, the Israelites, but there is also a tension between the Israelites and the Egyptians. Egypt is the important ethnic “other” in the *Pentateuch*, being mentioned in it 376 times against 96 references to Canaanites.

The *Pentateuch* promotes a narrative that places Israel’s origins in Mesopotamia, and the sojourn in Egypt is only temporary. This ethnohistory competes with an Egyptian origin tradition for Israel. Elsewhere, the Hebrew Bible seems to know only an origin tradition beginning in Egypt (*Amos*, *Ezekiel* 20, and *Psalms* 78, 106, and 136), as does some of the oldest accounts of Jewish origins in Greek literature.

The narratives of Joseph and Moses on their own could stand as testimonies to Egyptian Israelite heroes, but are linked in the *Pentateuch* to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, making Israel’s time in Egypt a detour rather than

a point of origin. This is an editorial device for the two different narratives of biblical Israel's origin, with the story of Joseph as a link.

The *Pentateuch* integrates two conflicting origin traditions by subordinating one to the other. The covenantal prophetic model of *Exodus* to *Deuteronomy* (and also the *Deuteronomistic History*), with its Mosaic myth of Israelite origins beginning in Egypt, is made to fit within the genealogical model of *Genesis*, with its patriarchal myth of Israelite origins in Mesopotamia.

The *Pentateuch* constructs a strong sense of discontinuity between Israel and Egypt by insisting that Israel, to be truly Israel, must be purged of all things Egyptian. The plundering motif (*Ex* 3:21-22; 11:2-3; 12:35-36) could be an attempt to fit the positive image of Egypt as a place of enrichment into the more negative frame of the need to separate from Egypt. The Egyptian Hagar and her son are rejected from the lineage of Israel (*Gen* 16, 21), the Israelites are persuaded to leave Egypt (*Ex* 1-14), the blaspheming half-Egyptian son (*Lev* 24:10-23) is stoned, and finally the entire Egyptian-born generation, including Moses, must die in the wilderness and only an entirely new generation, untouched by Egypt, can inherit the promised land (*Num* 14). Egypt, in much of the *Pentateuch*, is treated negatively.

Yet the *Pentateuch* also shows Egypt positively as a place of refuge, of plenty, and of enrichment—an alluring and attractive place—especially in the Joseph story where Israel leaves the famine-ridden territory of the Canaan to enter an Egypt that promises survival and prosperity. The motif of rebellion in the wilderness (*Ex* 16, 17; *Num* 11, 14, 16, 20) recognizes Egypt as a pleasant place, while suggesting such a thought was a rebellion against the divine. Are the Israelites different from Egyptians? By insisting that Egypt and Israel are distinct, the *Pentateuch* implies that some people needed to be convinced of it. It seems that many Israelites considered themselves Egyptian or closely linked to Egypt. In the Persian period, the obvious aim was to dissociate Israel from any positive leanings towards Egypt so as to encourage loyalty to Persia instead. The mixed perspective could be intended to assuage a pro-Egyptian element in the population while leaving an overall negative impression. If it were omitted the Egyptian faction would have been thoroughly alienated.

Contradictions spring from these ambiguities. Laws that speak of Israel as native to the land conflict with the tradition of Israel's origins elsewhere, and laws that speak of Israel as a sojourner in Egypt conflict with Israel's experience of slavery in Egypt. A rejection of Egypt cannot sit comfortably with an origin in Egypt.

The anti-Egyptian propaganda is best explained from a Persian perspective. The Persian empire's troubles in Egypt during this period, the location of Yehud between the empire and Egypt, and the presence of Judeans in Egypt, explain the *Pentateuch's* anti-Egyptian rhetoric. There were Judeans favourable to Egypt, and potentially subversive of the Persian backers of the colonists in Yehud. Canaan had been under Egyptian control or influence for most of its history. The original *Pentateuch* written in the Persian period sought to denigrate the Egyptians by emphasising the slavery they subjected the Israelites to. The Ptolemies, who were faced with the results of this propaganda in what was again an Egyptian subsidiary state, added a more favourable impression of Egypt than the Persians had left in their version of the *Pentateuch*, and the Maccabees, whose allies the Egyptians were against the Syrians, will have tended to add additional elements favourable to Egypt.

## **The Priestly Books**

Moses was a misunderstanding of the Persian name for God, whose name was attached to the sacred law of the Jews. About this time, when Joseph was added, the idea of explaining the name Moses arose. At first he was depicted as a Jewish leader who had received the covenant at Sinai or Horeb—in short as a retrogressed Ezra. This story too was then elaborated into a massive saga, but now the Egyptians are again the enemy! The Ptolemies wrote the Moses saga too, but it seems strange that the Pharaoh should be depicted so badly if the story was sponsored by an Egyptian king. It will have been rewritten in the time of the Seleucids whose enemy was the Ptolemies of Egypt.

The Seleucid or northern Greek kings took control of Palestine about 200 BC and apparently sponsored the elaboration of the story of Moses. *Exodus* and *Numbers* are therefore early second century BC. The *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, accurately dated to about 180 BC does not mention Moses. Though he was by then surely accepted as the great lawgiver of the Jews, his dramatic biography had not yet been written.

The great book of priestly laws called *Leviticus* was most likely written under the sponsorship of the Ptolemies when they were adding the *Septuagint* to the library of Alexandria. The aim of the priests was to maximize their income because they had been essentially treasurers and taxation officials of the Persian empire. When the empire fell however, they had the chance to raise money for themselves exclusively. Sacrifice might well have been a way that the temple was intended to raise money under the Persians, but certain passages contradict the idea that Yehouah wanted sacrifices made to him (*Isa* 1:11; *Ps* 51:16; *Jer* 6:20; and *Amos* 5:22). These express the later ideas of the Essenes, signifying a second or first century date.

The priests who set down the laws in *Leviticus*, provided for fields not to be fully reaped (*Lev* 19:9-10). They did not want to waste their wealth on welfare handouts and so made sure the cost came from the farmer. A corner was to be left, for the poor to pick so that they would not starve. It seems a humane act on the part of the priests of Yehouah, but it is curious that it also justifies the continuation of an ancient custom to mollify the corn-deity. The spirit of the corn fled before the reapers with their flashing scythes until it was trapped in the last corner. To avoid angering the spirit unnecessarily, the last corner was therefore left as a refuge for the spirit. So, the law in *Leviticus* merely condoned and gave a justification for an ancient practice.

Christians often claim that the Jewish scriptures were translated into Greek as the Greek *Septuagint* by 280 BC. The books of the *Pentateuch*, in the form they were in at the time, perhaps were but the rest of the biblical books were translated later, the whole process extending from c 250 to about the time of Herod. The documents found at Qumran show that the *Old Testament* was still being edited, and even written, in the times of the *New Testament*.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?**  
**Genesis Myths, Mesopotamian Mythology**

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## **Creation Myths**

The first account of Creation (attributed to P) ends at *Genesis* 2:4a. It is quite different from the second (J-E) account which continues from then on. It assumes a watery basis on which reality is created by God who completes the job in six days, resting on the seventh, thus giving an explanation of the seven days constituting the week. The origin of the myth is Zoroastrian and so it is post-Persian, as Julius Wellhausen recognized over 100 years ago, but which Jews and Christians still have not realized. It uses the word “tehom” to mean “the deep”, a word that is a form of the Babylonian “Tiamat”, the waters of the chaotic ocean upon which the world stood. In Babylonian mythology, Tiamat is depicted as the dragon of Chaos, the monster of disorder that Marduk had to slay to begin his creation! Just like this myth, the biblical one does not show the world as made *ex nihilo* but as an ordering of the chaos already present. Nevertheless, the word used initially is translated as “created”. It is “bara” and is something that only God can do. The Aramaean for “son of” is “bar”, and “bara” has more the sense of “begat” (Gesenius). So, in the beginning, God begat the heaven and the earth, but they were delinquent and He then had to discipline them.

Hermann Gunkel long ago pointed out the clues in the Jewish scriptures of a combat with a dragon, matching Marduk’s combat with Tiamat. He comments:

Nowhere in extant literature is the myth of Yehouah’s combat with the dragon actually narrated... Nevertheless, the fact that in all the passages that speak of the dragon, the myth is not portrayed but simply presupposed, proves that it was very well known and very popular with the people. The absence of the myth in the canon is distinct and conclusive evidence that we possess in our Old Testament a fragment only of the old religious literature.

It looks as if the explicit myth has even been suppressed. *Job* has a theme of God fighting with monsters. Thus *Job* 40-41 describe God’s oppression with reference to fights with monsters. *Amos* 9:3 warns that even those hiding at the bottom of the sea will be bitten by its serpent. *Psalms* 89:9-11 describes a victory over a sea monster called Rahab, and *Psalms* 74:12-17 describes the victory of God, described as a king, over the monster, Leviathan. The creation follows. In *Isaiah* 51:9-10, Yehouah also defeats a dragon. The Jewish seven branched candlestick, shown as a spoil of war on the arch of Titus, has at its base figures of dragons, which must be Leviathan, Behemoth, and Rahab, the mythological monsters of chaos of the missing Jewish creation myth.

The myth was a hymn to Yehouah. It was originally the Babylonian New Year myth of Tiamat. The scriptures contain hints of a great New Year festival that scholars presume, by accepting the biblical chronology as fact, was in the monarchic period. The kingship of the god Yehouah and his victory over chaos and evil—the forces opposing the purpose of Israel in the world—was shown as a ritual drama. The evidence, they say, is in the kingship and the royal psalms, but the psalms are mainly if not quite entirely post-Persian! The countries that were known to celebrate an elaborate New Year ceremony of the victory of God over Chaos were Persia and



Babylonia.

In the Babylonian New year ritual, the king is firmly identified with the community and has a central role in the New Year celebrations, the objective of which was to make sure that the king remained capable of representing his people. The king participated in a ritual combat in which the New Year fought the Old Year in a battle that also stood for the ultimate victory of Good over Evil and Order over Chaos. The hymn called the "Enuma Elish" was chanted. In it, the defeat of the dragon of Chaos, Tiamat, permitted the Creation to take place. Thus each year a new Creation was enacted and Chaos was defeated to ensure that the king maintained Order.

Biblical "scholars" are utterly incapable of relating their ideas to history that actually happened rather than the mythology of the bible that is barely confirmed anywhere else. In the Persian period, the Babylonian ceremonies would have been Persianized, especially after Xerxes put down the Babylonian rebellion and destroyed the temple of Marduk. The priestly prayer of *Nehemiah* 9 shows that Ezra's book of law had an account of the creation that must have been chanted at the New Year festival when the forces of chaos were overcome to allow creation. The *Genesis* account has the rhythm of a repetitive hymnic chant, so the chant will have been *Genesis* 1:1 to 2:4, which has the right metre for a chanted song, each stanza beginning "And God..." For the whole week of the festival, each day saw a new act of creation, and the final day was given over to resting. The creation pericope of *Genesis* 1-2:4a, is taken from the liturgy of the Babylonian or Persian New Year festival. Robert Alter in the *Art of Biblical Narrative*, recognizes that the Persian creation story of *Genesis* is utterly dualist. God splits heaven from earth, darkness and light, night and day, evening and morning, water and sky, sets of pairs of opposites.

Genesis 1-3 is replete with bipolar oppositions that must be held together, heaven/earth, night/day, man/woman, good/evil, death/life, mortality/immortality.

Tamara Cohn Eskenazi

Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, following Alter, advises us to consider the use of motifs, keywords and themes in the *Pentateuch*. She highlights the use of the word NKR in *Genesis* 37-42. It pertains to "recognizing" and, in the passage, Jacob is invited to "recognize" Joseph's clothing. Tamar deceives Judah with clothing and shows him what had happened by sending him items he "recoconizes". Joseph "recognizes" his brothers but makes himself "unrecognizable" to them and, sure enough, they do not "recognize" him. The art of recognizing, Eskenazi tells us is a "moral imperative to readers". We should drink to that because the author is teasing the reader who does not "recognize" the book for what it really is, dressed up as it is as a holy work. The bible is, like Tamar, disguised as something it is not, but the reader cannot "recognize" it. But the author knows, and mercilessly teases the gullible reader.

The whole "In the beginning" pericope sets the tone of the bible, yet Christians and Jews try to deny that their religions are dualist at all. The good God is destined to be the ultimate victor in the struggle of good and evil, so these religions are not dualist, but Zoroastrianism, from which they both derived, *is* dualist, they insist on telling us. Yet the Zoroastrian god is also destined to be the ultimate victor.

The difference is that the Persian religion is more logical because the Zoroastrian god is not omnipotent against his evil rival until the eschaton. The Judaeo-Christian god *is* however omnipotent, so we are left with a problem. Why does God not stop all the evil now? We have to believe that God could not stop a rebellion in heaven giving

us bad angels and their chief, the Devil, who is a match for the Almighty, just like the Zoroastrian religion, until the eschaton, so God is not omnipotent and His religions are equally dualist. Or, He has to let human beings introduce evil into the world—as a by product of free will—since otherwise they would not be loving Him voluntarily—thus making God into some sort of sadistic megalomaniac.

Both Judaism and Christianity are imperfect copies of Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism has an answer for evil, but these religions do not—within the scope of their own dogma. In Zoroastrianism, the good principle and the evil principle are created equal at the outset, except for one small difference. Of the twin spirits, Ahuramazda is Prometheus—he has foresight—whereas Angra Mainyu is Epimetheus—he has none. The gift of foresight ensures victory for the good.

## Adam and Eve

The second version of the Creation assumes a waterless waste from which God made man as the initial creation. Eden (*Gen 2:8-14*) is the mythical home of man.

Yehouah Elohim planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

*Gen 2:8*

Having formed man, God makes other plants and animals, and finally woman. This is a more folksy, less theological version and was probably among the folklore brought by the colonists from Harran to Palestine. Here the word used of “forming” man means “moulded”, a more appropriate usage for the metaphor employed—that of a potter shaping clay. The word “adam” appears in Sumerian meaning a lump of clay, “adama”. So, Adam is moulded clay brought to life by the breath of God, a metaphor that now is taken by most people as true in that they still hold on to the idea of a soul or spirit—the word being simply the breath (*ruach, pneuma, spiritus*) of God. Adam is the image of God, but the word used (“selem”) probably derives from the casting of a shadow by the sun, so is better translated as “shadow”.

The P source has male and female created together and God “called their name Adam”, but the J-E source has the woman created as an afterthought. Babylonia and Persia held women as the equals of men in society, but this myth made her inferior, and this is the one that prevailed, though both existed side-by-side in *Genesis*. In the same way, the P version has man created along with the animals and so classified with them, but the J-E version puts man in charge of the whole of nature, an invitation to disaster that we are only beginning to realize. J-E calls the woman “Ishshah” which can only be read as “ruled by Ish” where the man has been called “Ish”.

Later, her actions lead Ish to the fall from God’s grace. Jews and Christians readily accept that a perfectly good God will allow Eve to be tempted with a temptation He knew she could not resist. Such a God is so obviously not perfectly good, it throws doubt on the story, as well as the religion. Professor Tim West has also pointed out that the author of these passages seems not to realize that God is being cruel in giving these creatures desires that could be fulfilled, then forbidding them to fulfil these desires. West says that to place desire in their heart then to punish them when they seek the happiness that they are driven to by their nature, seems the pinnacle of heartlessness. It is as though God were playing a game, as he did with Job. What kind of God is this? What is the author of *Genesis* trying to say about God? Is the author of *Genesis* saying that God is good? Does he love Him, or does he wonder about His cruel pitiless control? Is he telling us that God is evil, cruel, heartless,

and spiteful? Is this Creator the Demiurgos, not the High God?

And Yehouah of the Gods commanded the man, saying, Eating you may eat of every tree in the garden, but of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil you may not eat, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Gen 2:16-17

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, we discover, is the tree in the midst of the garden, but the situation and details of the Tree of Life are not given. The tree in the midst of the garden has not to be eaten, lest they die, so it is a tree of death! In fact, the pair may not even touch the tree in the middle of the garden! The serpent tells Eve something different:

And the serpent, "cunning above every animal of the field which Yehouah of the Gods had made", said to the woman, Dying you shall not die, for God knows that in the day you eat of it, even your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

Gen 3:4-5 Litv

The woman took and ate the fruit and gave some to her mate.

And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed leaves of the fig tree, and made girdles for themselves.

Gen 3:7 Litv

Yehouah now explains why he was concerned at the turn of events and why He has to expel the pair from Paradise:

And Yehouah of the Gods said, Behold! The man has become as one of us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put forth his hand and also take from the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever, Yehouah of the Gods sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground out of which he was taken.

Gen 3:22-23 Litv

This says that eternal life was not an attribute of the primaeval pair, and death could not have been the punishment of the sin of disobedience. The story is incoherent.

As it is, when the serpent in the story told the pair they would not die when they ate the fruit, he was telling the truth. It was God who was lying when He said at the outset that "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die". They did not die on that day. Their punishment was immediate expulsion from the garden, and death at a later date. Adam lived to be 930 years old.

Biblicists say the death spoken of that occurs by eating the fruit is meant metaphorically or poetically, and never meant instant death, as it says. In fact, the text does not literally say that. It says:

For in the day that you eat of it, *dying you shall die*.

And the serpent uses the same but negative construction, “dying you shall not die”, in reply to Eve. The literal construction indeed seems to mean “being mortal (dying) you shall die”. The day that the fruit is eaten is the day the eater becomes mortal, not the day of an immediate death. Even so, the serpent’s reply then is “being mortal you shall not die”, so death would not be instantaneous as if God had meant it would be. The puzzle remains that God’s later reference to the danger that they would eat the fruit of the Tree of Life and acquire immortality means the pair were not immortal anyway.

An explanation might be that, if the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is really a tree of death because death accompanied the knowledge the gods have, then the Tree of Life is its antidote, so that by eating both fruit, the pair can remain immortal but gain the knowledge that gods have. The trouble is that the pair ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and were made mortal, but still seem not to have the knowledge that gods have. A get out might be that neither death nor knowledge is given instantly but both come slowly, thus yielding the very situation we find in our lives. Then immortality would be necessary for the full knowledge of the gods to be attained. Men only get a little of the way there, but then they die. Immortality would be sufficient for godhood, the knowledge coming through an eternal life of experience. So the only tree necessary was the Tree of Life. The primaeval pair were already gods, but inexperienced ones, and would become fully gods when they had lived for eternity.

This was like the original good creation in Zoroastrianism which was spoiled by the Evil Spirit, but here no evil could be a match for God, and so an alternative way of introducing imperfection into the world was needed. By disobeying the high god, they fell from grace meaning they lost their godliness and became mortal. They were deprived of access to the Tree of Life in the garden. Without it, they would die, and that would have been the end of God’s little experiment. For it to go on, because the pair were no longer immortal, they had to reproduce, and God presumably had foreseen all this and prepared for it in advance. Here was the reason for the invention of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, primarily meaning the Knowledge of Sexuality. Sex was considered the mark of the Fall from immortality or grace as Christians called it.

Immortality and sexuality are the two main connotations of the snake in mythology and in modern psychology too. Nothing in the story suggests the serpent is the Devil, as believers assume, and the Gnostics thought that the good serpent was warning the pair against the wicked Demiurgos who had made them, and wanted to keep them in ignorance. The Jewish scriptures have Moses putting up a brass serpent for the Israelites to worship, presumably a representation of Yehouah. The Babylonian equivalent of Yehouah or Yah was Ea, their god of water—a good God—represented by the zig-zag symbol of rippling water. Do the Gnostics have a point here? With the story as it is, God tells a lie. The pair will not die when they ate the fruit, just as the serpent said. God apparently does not want the pair to become gods so, he tells them a lie to dissuade them from eating the forbidden fruit. The pair were the “children” of the heavenly “father” and so were supposed to obey Him. A father does not have to explain anything to his children. Traditionally they just have to obey him. Created beings had no right to question their Creator even though he had given them a brain to make them inquisitive!

Let the punishment fit the crime has been a principle of eastern justice since before Hamurabi. What connexion is there between the eating of a fruit, and sorrow in bringing forth children, the punishment inflicted on women ever after? To fit the crime, eating the forbidden fruit must be a metaphor for the sexual act! Conception and childbearing are the consequences of the act forbidden. The writers of this story believed sex was the source of all evil, whence the consequences and the curse on women, and she is then no longer Ishshah but Eve

("Hawwah"). In Hebrew, the name "Hewwah", aspirated, signifies a female serpent (Clement of Alexandria). Eve and the serpent are identified.

We can be certain that nobody was taking notes when Adam and Eve had their adventures in Eden. It must have been written much later, when the Jews were a nation, whether it is considered true by divine inspiration or not. God's promise to Abraham was that he should have seed "numerous as the stars of heaven for multitude", and to support this notion, the descent of Abraham is traced up to the first created man, who is commanded to increase and multiply. Yet to do so, the primæval couple had to disobey God! The condemnation of the primæval act of procreation was contrary to the central idea of patriarchal history.

## Serpent and Satan

The mythological serpent had, at one time, a human form. The serpent of Eden, in this myth of the fall, speaks as a wise friend of the primæval pair, but came to be thought of as the personification of evil. The "old serpent having two feet", of Persian mythology, is Ahriman, the Evil Spirit, whence the association of Satan and the serpent in Jewish and Christian theology. According to the Persian legend in the *Bundish*, the full version of which will have been among the lost parts of the *Zend-Avesta*, Meschia and Meschiane, the first man and woman, were seduced by Ahriman, in the form of a serpent, and they committed "in thought, word, and deed, the carnal sin, and thus tainted with original sin all their descendants". Yet, in other traditions, the serpent was the symbol of wisdom and healing, even having that role in the biblical exodus from Egypt.

Originally serpents were neither good nor bad, but, like humans, some were good and some bad. They were the dead ancestors—often the founders and spiritual guides of the clan—because snakes liked to hide in the rocky cairns that people built in memory of their dead fathers. Moreover, the serpent was always connected with adoration of the male organ—the symbol of the Bacchanalia is a serpent—presumably for its phallic shape, and the latter's role in perpetuating the clan. The serpent thus became connected with founding fathers and gods of wisdom. It was the symbol of Thoth of Egyptian mythology. The third member of the Akkadian triad, Ea (Hea, Hoa), is also symbolized by the serpent, and his titles show him to have been the source of all knowledge (Sir Henry Rawlinson). He stands for life.



Old Serpent. Ahriman  
the Zoroastrian Evil  
Spirit or Satan

Having been cast out of the garden, God places cherubs and a flaming sword in the east of Eden to prevent the naughty couple from returning to Paradise. The popular idea that cherubs are baby angels is chocolate box nonsense. The protecting cherub of Jewish mythology was the sacred bull (*Ezek 1 and 10*), which symbolized the productive force in nature, and so was associated with sun gods—the flaming sword. The Persian high god, Ahuramazda, after he had created the heavens and the earth, formed the first creature, Zoroaster's primæval bull (*Zend-Avesta*). This bull was poisoned by Ahriman, but its seed was carried, by the ox-soul of the dying animal to the moon, "where it is continually purified and fecundated by the warmth and light of the sun, to become the germ of all creatures". Meanwhile, the material prototypes of all living things, including man himself,

issued from the body of the bull.

References to the serpent, to the tree of wisdom, and to the bull in the legend of the fall, prove its phallic character, recognized even in the early Christian church (S Jerome, letter on Virginity to Eustochia). The serpent, like the bull, symbolized regeneration, but especially in men—fecundity in particular—while the bull stood for regeneration in Nature as a whole—fecundity in general.

This antagonism was that of Osiris and Seti (Seth), with victory for the god of Nature (Osiris-Apis). The contests between Osiris and Seth, and afterwards that between Horus and Typhon, were important in later Egyptian mythology. Typhon, the adversary of Horus, was a serpent, called Aphophis, or the Giant. He was a later form of the god, Seth. This struggle is depicted in the biblical account of the exodus, when the golden calf (bull) was set up in the Hebrew camp. Moses replaced it by a brass seraph (serpent) to heal the people. It was the emblem of the pharaohs of Egypt, who could heal, but also of the Phœnician healing god, Æsculapius, and sure enough it cured the people of the bites that afflicted them.

Serpents also symbolized eternal life from their habit of sloughing off their skins and looking renewed. Isis (Ish-Ish), the goddess of life and healing, wore a crown of asps, for this reason. The Gorgons supposedly had crowns of serpents, as well as a horrific mask, and were the three aspects of the moon goddess—which Isis was also—and the moon held the seeds of life. *The Holy Word, Part 2*, makes the brass serpent raised up by Moses symbolic of Christ and eternal life:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

*John 3:14-15*

Before the thirteenth century BC, Seth was a great god universally adored throughout Egypt, who conferred life and power on to the sovereigns of the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties. The greatest pharaoh of the latter dynasty, Sethos, had his name from this god. Then, Seth was cast as an evil demon, and his images and name were obliterated on all the monuments and inscriptions that could be reached. Curiously, he appears in the genealogies of *Genesis* as the father of Enosh (the man). Here is a relic of another creation story in which Enosh was an Adam created by Seth. The religion of the Israelites favoured the ass, the firstborn of which alone of all animals was allowed to be redeemed, and the red heifer, whose ashes made a “water of separation” for purification from sin. Both of these animals were sacred to Seth (Typhon), the ass being his symbol, and red oxen being at one time sacrificed to him. It suggests Seth was once a god favoured by the Israelites.

The Egyptians celebrate the festivals of Typhon under the form of an ass, which they call Seth.

Epiphanius

When Antiochus Epiphanes entered the temple at Jerusalem, he found in the Holy of Holies a stone figure of a man with a long beard, carrying a book, mounted on an ass (Diodorus). The figure is taken to have been Moses, but, in the Egyptian myth, Seth fled from Egypt riding on a gray ass! A gnostic sect taught that Christ was Seth. The appearance of the two trees is countered by textual analysis which suggests the original story had only one as in the Persian myth. A Sumerian cylinder seal of about 2000 BC shows a tree guarded by a serpent, with a male and a female figure on either side. The female was reaching out towards the tree. In Hindu mythology,



Siva, the Supreme Being, tempted an incarnated Brahma, by dropping from heaven a blossom of the sacred fig-tree. Brahma's wife, Satarupa, instigated him to get the blossom, believing it would make him immortal, and so, divine. He got it, but Siva cursed him, and doomed him to misery and degradation.

So, it was not an apple tree, as we ought to have known because the pair used fig leaves as garments when they realised they were naked. Divers peoples in history have held the fig tree as sacred—its fruit having the significance of the virgin womb. The banyan (*Ficus indicus*) is sacred in Africa and Asia. In Egypt, the banyan (*Ficus sycomorus*) was sacred. A basket of figs was carried in processions for Bacchus. The sacred phallus itself, and the statues of Priapus were made of the wood of the fig-tree (Plutarch). The sycomore fig was also sacred among the Jews.

In the bible, the Tree of Life is distinct from the Tree of Knowledge (*Gen 2:9*). The fig-tree is much more likely to have been the type of the Tree of Knowledge of the Garden of Eden. The Tree of Life stood for the male organ and was the palm tree. The bo-tree (*Ficus religiosa*) of the Buddhists derived greater sacredness when found encircling the palm—the bo-tree united in marriage with the palm! The couple could eat the fruit of the Tree of Life and so were immortal. It is the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge that must not be eaten. The point of the modified myth is simple and direct—the people could not expect to know all things, and to attempt to do so was a grievous sin that would lose them the chance of immortality. Here was a sort of Uncertainty Principle at work—the choice was knowledge or immortality, but not both. It is the symbolic expression of the more directly admitted requirement of Christian bishops for unquestioning belief. Knowledge was restricted and no one should want to know too much:

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

*Dt 29:29*

The author has drawn upon old Babylonian legends in which the first man lost his immortality through the guile of those who were cleverer than him, to construct a parable of this passage from *Deuteronomy*. He could do it because *Deuteronomy* was the first book written of the Jewish Bible, not *Genesis*. Its real purpose was to stop people from even thinking about questioning the rule of law. It was God's will and that was it!

## **Where Was Eden?**

Where was Eden? It is considered a great mystery, and there are probably a hundred theories about the situation of Eden including Luther's that it was the whole world (ignoring what the bible says, as they do when it suits them). It has recently been put under the waters of the Persian Gulf and scarcely more reasonably in the Shatt-el-Arab, the marshes at the confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. How the biblical dry wasteland becomes a wet wasteland is for the biblicists to explain. They will be able to!

Yet Assyriologists and historians of the ancient near east have always known where it is. There are plenty of biblical clues. "Eden" is an Akkadian word "edinu" from the Sumerian word "eden", meaning "plain" or "steppe". Eden is a symbol of great fertility in *Isaiah 51:3*; *Ezekiel 36:35* and *Joel 2:3*. Both *Isaiah* and *Ezekiel* promise that the waste places of Judah will blossom, becoming as Eden. *Joel*, referring to the locust invasion, indicates that prior to their arrival the land was as Eden but, after their departure, was a desolate place. Eden is also a

place whence the merchants of Tyre obtained richly embroidered cloths (*Ezek 27:23*). *Amos 1:5* speaks of Beth Eden in the context of punishments on Syrian nations. In *2 Kings 19:12* and *Isaiah 37:12*, the “sons of Eden” are mentioned with Gozan, Haran and Rezeph as the name of places conquered by the Assyrians. What could be more specific?

The plain was described as itself waterless but having a source of water nevertheless called, in the various translations of *Genesis 2:6*, by the Sumerian word “ed” given as “mist”, “flood” and “stream”. The same word in *Job 36:27* is mainly given as “mist”. But, though the passage in *Job* is highly meteorological, the *Septuagint* translates the same word in *Job* as “fountain”, suggesting that “spring” is meant. Eden was watered by a “mist” or “stream” or “spring” that “went up” (“*Alah*”) over the ground (*Gen 2:6*), a description, either of a stream or river flooding, or simply of the welling up of a spring. Either “spring” or “mist” would suit the foothills of the mountains better than an utterly flat arid plain, and since *Job* is considered to be of Phœnician provenance, this apparently dialect word is also a clue to where Eden was.

“Nahar” is a river, stream, or canal, in each case a permanent watercourse. In its first biblical appearance “nahar” is used for the “rivers” of Eden. The Jewish scriptures (*Gen 2:8,10; 4:16*) give a clear topography of Eden:

And a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.

*Gen 2:10*

The Garden of Eden is described as having one river, but Eden has four significant rivers heading upstream to their headwaters (heads). The four rivers of Eden include the Tigris (Hiddekel) and the Euphrates. The other two are Pishon and Gihon, both now unknown but Gihon encloses Cush, Tigris feeds Assyria and Pishon encompasses Havilah, a land with gold. Some suggest that “heads” means the opposite, it is “mouths”, making the description one of a delta, and therefore impossible.

The Euphrates is called the “nahar Perat” (the word Euphrates is just Greek for “beautiful Parat”) or merely “nahar”, the River. The two upper tributaries of the Euphrates, the Balikh and the Khabur, may be those called the “two rivers” in the expression “Aram Naharaim”—“Aram of the Two Rivers”, or perhaps just “Aram of the Rivers”, because the expression is simply a plural. The promised land stretches from the “river (nahar) of Egypt” to “the great river, the River Euphrates” (*Gen 15:18*)—the very extent of the Persian satrapy of Abarnahara. Incidentally, the Jordan is never called “nahar”. It is always just “The Jordan”.

The second-named of the four rivers of Eden is called Gihon (*Gen 2:13*) said to compass the whole land of Cush. Cush is foolishly thought to be Ethiopia—a mistake made already in *Genesis* because Nubia was also known as Cush—leading “scholars” to claim the Gihon is the Nile, but this Cush is the land of the (Akkadian) “kashshu”—Kassites. Biblical confusion over Cush has Assyria appearing in two separate groups of people when *Genesis* comes to dividing them. Babylonia was ruled by a Kassite dynasty for 600 years, but the word seems to have been used of the Indo-European invaders that settled in Iran at an earlier period. The Caspian Sea might be named after them or their god. So Kush is the mountain country north and east of Mesopotamia, or even Mesopotamia itself, and came to mean the lands where Babylonians and Persians lived. The Gihon must have been one of the several rivers which descend from the northern mountains to join the Euphrates river in the Syrian plain.

The Pishon, the first-mentioned of the four rivers that went forth from Eden, flowed through the “Havilah”, a land of gold (*Gen* 2:11). Havilah cannot be identified now but, according to the table of nations in the bible, he was a son of Cush—again evidently meaning the Kassites not the Ethiopians—so must have been one of the Indo-European Kassite tribes (*Gen* 10:7; *1 Chr* 1:9). Eratosthenes cited by Strabo lists the Chaulotai (a Greek transliteration of Havilah) next to the Nabataeans in describing the route from Petra to Babylon, and Pliny also refers to them as neighbours of the Nabataeans. Havilah is therefore on the caravan route in northwest Arabia, east of the Sinai and Petra and fringing the northern edge of the Syrian desert, by Palmyra. A river that runs from the highlands into the Euphrates is the Khabur, which might have been Pishon, if Khabur could have received its name from Havilah by changes in pronunciation. The Khabur is the river of Gozan (*2 Kg* 17:6).

Von Soden (*The Ancient Orient*), discussing this region, notes:

The small water courses, which were so important for farming, were found only in a few places outside of the hill country, such as in the region of the spring-fed sources of the Habur (Khabur).

The “spring-fed sources of the Khabur” take is back to the earlier discussion of springs or mists. These northern steppe lands were such good agricultural land that intensive cultivation permitted the export of surpluses. Salination was not the trouble it was down the rivers.

Moreover, it was not the flood plains of the Nile, the Tigris and Euphrates, and the Indus that were first used by agriculturalists. The tendency to flood was not easily controlled by primitive people, the dry season was long and harsh, the swamps were malarial, and the rivers were infested with nasty biting animals and snakes. Settlers preferred the higher reaches of large rivers like these. Towards the foothills, the land was watered enough, but the other problems were less serious. This is where any sensible Eden would be, not in the marshes and swamps. Having established themselves in the foothills and high plains, the gardeners and farmers slowly spread downriver, taking their skills with them, and slowly learning how to cope with the difficulties of the flood plains.

All of this suggests that Eden was conceived of as Mesopotamia, properly speaking—what the Greeks understood as Mesopotamia—where the two great rivers Tigris and Euphrates run off the Turkish Plateau and several tributaries of the Euphrates similarly arise. The name of this area in the time of the Assyrians was, in Akkadian, Bit Adini or Beth Eden! Bit Adini stretched from the western side of the Euphrates across the northern plain to the Tigris, where the Assyrian cities were. Its main towns were Urfa and Harran!

The plain was fertile, prosperous and welcoming compared with the desiccated hills of Yehud, and the deportees' nostalgia for it gave Eden the meaning of “pleasure” or “delight”. In the *Septuagint*, the Garden of Eden is the Garden of Delight—Paradise (*Rev* 2:7). Paradise is a word of Persian origin for a Lord's pleasure land, like a king's hunting park. So, even the biblical Garden of Eden was scarcely just a garden. The Persian word “pardes” from which “paradise” comes, through Greek, is used only three times (*Neh* 2:8; *Song* 4:13 and *Ecc* 2:5) in the Jewish scriptures. It was the archaeologist, George Smith, who discovered the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, that deciphered cuneiform tablets from the library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh and found that “eden” was the Sumerian word meaning a “plain”. He also found that the Sumerian paradise was called Tilmun, a place where lions did not kill and wolves did not carry off sheep until the first human displeased the gods.

There is little mystery over the whereabouts of Eden. The Assyrians named it as Bit Adini, and Bit Adini was in a place that matches as precisely as anyone could expect, from old writings, the region around Harran that the bible suggests the Persian colonists of Yehud came from. The biblicists will not admit it because by so doing they have to accept that the bible is wrong. Eden was not a place remotely distant in time but was known in Assyrian times.

## **Cain and Abel**

The story of Cain and Abel is another allegory of the replacement of the people and their god by aliens. Abel means "[Our] Father is El". The father of the people in old custom was their god, and the tribe or gens were sons of the god. Ebla, the ancient city of Syria, probably meant "Our Father is El" too, so the worship of El had an ancient provenance in the Levant. Abel therefore stood for those who worshipped El and his court, the original inhabitants of the Palestinian hills before the colonists arrived from Babylon.

Now Cain plainly stands for Canaan or the Canaanites, but also puns on the word "qanah" meaning "possess". So, Cain and Abel are both the same people, the Canaanites of the Palestinian hills, but some of them, represented by Cain, killed off the others, the worshippers of El. So we see in miniature the displacement of the god El and his court when some of the Canaanites turned against him. The victors were the "Possessors" of the land, but in the development of the story they were sent into exile in the land of Nod (the land of Wanderers), so they stand for the "returners", the colonists who were presented as people who had earlier been exiled.

The story is brief and seems to have been altered. Perhaps it was taken from the legends of the El worshippers because Abel's offering is approved yet Abel cruelly dies, while Cain's is not, yet Cain is protected by God and after apparently being condemned to a life of wandering becomes a builder of cities. Plainly the original story was not that which we now read. The logic is that Abel became the prosperous builder of cities because his sacrifice was proper while Cain was condemned to nomadism. Thus we see a foundation legend of a city such as Ebla which instituted proper sacrifices to El and prospered while the Canaanites remained as shepherds. It explains the differences between town and country.

That Abel was slain in the field suggests that the original sacrifice was indeed a human one for the fertility of the crops, and the Phœnicians certainly still sacrificed humans into historic times, as their tophets notably in Carthaginian cities show. Excavations near the city of Gezer have turned up clay jars containing the charred bones of babies, just like those in the tophets, showing that the Canaanites of the foothills below Jerusalem had the same sacrificial habits. Large standing stones seemed to be linked with the worship of the sun, who the Phœnicians called Salim (Solomon) in one of his aspects. The Persians abhorred human sacrifice and considered such religions as those of the diva (daeva) gods, the agents of the Evil Spirit. They changed the story to condemn the El religion and its practices, transferring the success of the Canaanite cities to their less prosperous brothers in the hills.

Cain became ultimately a city builder after he had travelled to the east. It becomes another parable of return. Cain is protected by God with his mark while wandering in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Eden is Bit Adini (Adiabene), now Syria, and east of it is Mesopotamia and the land of the Medes and Persians, showing that that is where the colonists "returned" from. Slaves were commonly marked as such, and primitive people often

marked themselves in some way to show they were slaves of their own god. This might be taken from a Canaanite legend explaining the origin of circumcision. Later, a better myth was devised, so this one was left cryptic.

Who replaces Abel? Eve has another son, Seth. Yet comparing Cain's subsequent descendants (*Gen 4:17-18*) with those of Seth show that they are the same people with minor variations. Seth has a son Enosh and he has a son Kenan! The remaining people until Noah were the same as those in Cain's list except that two are interchanged, Enoch and Mahalalel. Moreover, Enosh means the same as Adam—man! So, in both genealogies “man” has a son Cain or Kenan who then have the same set of descendants. The P author of the Seth list wanted Cain to disappear and disguised him as Kenan, but the identity is transparent. We only see it because the J list was restored, presumably after the destruction of Nehemiah's library in the Maccabean rebellion.

The same process of reconstruction undertaken by the Maccabees accounts for omissions, doublets, triplets and confused passages found elsewhere in the bible. Abraham (twice, *Gen 12, 20*) and Isaac (*Gen 26*) trade their wives as sisters to a foreign king, Moses is called twice (*Ex 3 and 6*), Beersheba is named twice (*Gen 21 and 26*) and Hagar flees twice (*Gen 16 and 21*). Two stories of the Flood are woven together from the P and the J-E sources. The biblical passages that look complete and do not contain any or many such problems have probably been composed or at least rewritten from scratch by the Maccabean priests in the second century BC. An overall editor must have been in charge which explains much of the unity of style of the bible.

We read at this point:

And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of Yehouah.

*Gen 4:26*

Restoring Yehouah instead of “The Lord”. For the J author Yehouah was always god's name but the P author wants to reserve the name Yehouah until it is revealed to Moses. Again, the contradiction appears because both versions have been clumsily included presumably after the civil war.

## The Flood

The Flood narrative is taken from Mesopotamian legends so will have been brought in by the Persian colonists. The hero of the Sumerian tale was Ziusudra, and of the Assyrian was Utnapishtim (entitled Atrahasis, “unsurpassed in wisdom”). *Genesis 6:5-8* is like the Utnapishtim story in which the gods decide to destroy humanity, but there Enlil tries drought and plague before settling on a flood. No flood is explicitly mentioned here either, and nor are the other attempts, but when the story resumes at *Genesis 7:1*, the flood is presumed, and Noah is being instructed in how to load his ark. Something is missing. The P source seems to give the more complete narrative and uses Elohim as the name of God. The theme of punishment is Deuteronomic and therefore suited the Persians, and the sign of the rainbow seems to be nothing less than their Chinvat Bridge between heaven and earth, an easy crossing of which was promised to those who obey God.

The P source says nothing about Noah offering sacrifices after the inundation, while the J source does. The priests had perhaps by then devised the Moses saga and wanted to reserve the initiation of sacrifice for their

new hero. *Genesis* 9:1-17 is the P account of God's covenant with Noah. It is the first covenant in the biblical scheme of history, but really was an echo of the covenant introduced in reality with *Deuteronomy*, the law brought by Ezra from Persia.

The original flood myth seems to have been designed to explain an immersion ceremony. After the initiate had been baptized, he was promised eternal life with the gods. It was probably the founding myth of the mystery religions which spread to Greece and the Roman empire.

The extraordinarily long lives of the antediluvian people echoes the even longer lives of the Sumerian pre-flood kings. They allow the symbolic chronology of the bible to be met without extending the book to a vastness. The Sumerians listed ten antediluvian kings and the Seth genealogy also has ten names on it, from Adam to Noah. The seventh Sumerian legendary king was considered specially holy and so too we find here the name Enoch as the seventh in line, and he "walked with Elohim". Hooke comments that "these striking correspondences can hardly be due to chance".

Sir Leonard Woolley thought he had found evidence of the biblical flood in the form of thick deposits of mud near the city of Ur. Believers and biblicists were overjoyed. Then other towns were found to be associated with similar thick deposits—but they corresponded to different times. They turned out to be large lakes fed by the rivers and used as a resource of the cities, probably to supply fish and reeds. Yet Christians are still citing this as evidence of the Flood.

Walter Mattfeld has shown that Noah's blessing of Japheth is a blessing of Cyrus and his Medo-Persian empire. Cyrus had royal Median blood from Astages, his grandfather (the last king of Media). Arabs, Egyptians, Greeks and Jews all called the Persians Medes (Madaï). They are descendants of Japheth who is Iapetos, the father of the Greeks, who were also Indo-Europeans. Madaï's Japhethic descent is based on the Persian royal court's reworking of the Athenian Greek Medus myth, used by Datis, Darius I's Median general, in 490 BC to justify the invasion of Greece. The Persian administrators used the same tale in *Genesis*, hinting at it being composed in the 400s BC.

## **The Tower of Babel**

In the other was the sacred precinct of Zeus Belus, a square enclosure, two furlongs each way, with gates of solid brass; which was also remaining in my time. In the middle of the precinct was a tower of solid masonry, a furlong in length and breadth, upon which was raised a second tower, and on that a third, and so on up to eight. The ascent to the top is on the outside, by a path which winds round all the towers. When one is about half way up, one finds a resting place and seats, where people are wont to sit some time on their way to the summit. On the topmost tower, there is a spacious temple, and inside the temple stands a couch of unusual size, richly adorned, with a golden table by its side. There was no statue of any kind set up in the place, nor is the chamber occupied at nights by anyone but a single native woman, who, as the Chaldaeans, the priests of this god affirm, is chosen for himself by the deity out of all the women in the land.

Herodotus, *Histories* 1, 181

From the foot of the ziggurat, the appearance was that of a stairway to heaven, and this stairway, described as



a ladder might have been what the author envisaged when he described Jacob's vision of a ladder ascending to heaven (*Gen* 28:12). What is also interesting about Herodotus's account is that it seems contemporary, implying that the Tower of Babel was still operating even after Xerxes was said to have plundered it. Herodotus speaks of a large golden statue having been removed and perhaps it can be assumed that the temple was stripped of much of its wealth, but it seemed not to have ceased functioning in the time of Herodotus, about 450 BC. Indeed, the absence of a statue in the topmost room, presumably a Holy of Holies, reminds us of Persian practice in general, and the Jewish practice, in particular.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?**  
**Patriarchs Or “Returners?” (Part I)**

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### **Canaanites, Hebrews or Israelites?**

Few scholars today can honestly see any sign of a conquest of Canaan by an external people. Some argue that the Israelites conquered Canaan from within by a rebellion. A group of people cannot emerge within a larger common group and then have an ethnic identity different from the rest. The claim can be made but it could not be true. Why then should a group of natives make such a claim? All of their contemporaries would have known it was false. The claim could only have been made for some reason at a much later date, when no one could dispute it.

The later date was after the conquests of the Persian kings when Cyrus and his successors decided to set up Palestine as a loyal buffer state against Egypt. The reason was the instrument the shahs used to achieve their objective—by transporting into Palestine people loyal to the God of Heaven, the Persian universal god. Certainly the narratives written in the fifth century doubtless used names and themes familiar to the indigenous people of Palestine, and changes were made later as successive generations of Persian administrators were sent to carry out the policy. Further changes were made by the Maccabees after their war of independence.

But a central theme was always that the Jews were people that had come into Canaan from outside with a refined god, and had had to combat native religions, and tendencies to go native, ever after. The original Jews indeed came from the banks of the Euphrates, not in 2000 BC, but in the fifth century BC.

### **The Patriarchal Tradition**

The Abraham myth could not have been purely invented, but had to be based on an extant tradition. The people who really could have had such a tradition could not have been from the south of the Levant. They had to be from the north of it and Syria. Why then should northern myths appear in the south other than that northerners were deported to the south? They then wrote a myth based on an extant tradition using old gods as ethnic markers of themselves, and their actual experience of moving from the Euphrates to Judah.

Isaac had no proper mythology associated with himself and seems to have been introduced largely as a warning not to sacrifice children. The two patriarchs remaining are Abraham and Jacob. When it came to writing a history, the Deuteronomists found that no Judah was mentioned in Persian archives, but Israel and Samaria were. They overcame the problem by identifying Jacob quite artificially with Israel. So, Jacob became the founder of Israel under his new name, and, through being the father of twelve other founders, he founded Judah too. This scheme implies that Judah emerged from Israel, and not an equal, or even the same, as Judaism subsequently taught. The history of the two countries shows that Judah succeeded Israel and was hardly ever contemporary with it. Abraham seems to have been a northern god, and possibly envisaged by the Persian administration, influenced by the early colonists, as the founder god of the people of Abarnahara, who would be called Hebrews. Rivalries between the colonists and the locals showed this to have been impossible. It was imposing a god on the

Canaanites, and it was easier to restore a local god than to impose a new one. The colonists had to make their god El, and persuade the locals that they had been worshipping him wrongly. Even that, though, did not work because a large number of locals preferred Yehouah not El as the accessible god, and ultimately Yehouah was the choice. It suggests that the first century of colonial settlement of Yehud was chaotic, and it was only really sorted out after the Egyptian rebellion of the middle of the fifth century—probably with local support—with the arrival of the Persian minister Nehemiah, and, to consecrate the changes, the Persian minister, Ezra. That is when the bible began to be written.

The stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are unparalleled in their time and are equalled only by the stories in Herodotus about particular people like Gigas, Croesus and Tamiris. At the supposed time of Abraham, around 2000 BC, even great nations like Sumer and Agade did not record such elaborate stories about their founding heroes as prose sagas. What they did was to write poems about Sargon and Naram-Suen (Naram-Sin), usually not long ones. The epic of the mythical hero, Gilgamesh, is a long poem, but few would see it as a model for the Abraham stories.

Herodotus, however, wrote about the history of the Persians, who had not long before conquered Babylon and so had acquired her empire which covered all the lands travelled by Abraham including Judah, yet had nothing to say about any of the biblical characters, even though such ancient and extraordinary stories were even then a thousand years old. The straightforward explanation is that these stories were written after Herodotus wrote, and they used his accounts as a model.

Of the people of the ancient Near East, the ones who were particularly fond of stories of eponymous fathers of nations were the Greeks and the Jews. The same applied to the fondness for the genealogies that accompanied the founding father stories, used to prove nobility of stock, true ethnicity, or even descent from a god. Giovanni Garbini does not see this curiosity as coincidental.

The earliest Greek genealogy was that of Acusilaus in the sixth century BC followed by Hecataios of Miletus, and Pherecydes, about the time of Herodotus. The intermediary, assuming there was no direct contact, must have been the Persians. The Persians occupied the intellectual cities of the Greeks in Asia Minor, and employed myriads of Greeks in all ranks and capacities. Greeks employed at the Persian court must have been familiar with Herodotus, who must have been the fashion of his day, by the end of the fifth century, and the Persian ministries must have been able to write a bogus history of the Jewish colonists based on the model of Herodotus. Moreover, it does not seem at all unlikely that some of the Persian colonists deported to Yehud were Greeks, particularly around 400 BC when Xenophon's mercenary army hired by the rebel, Cyrus the Younger, was defeated by Artaxerxes II, and had to fight a long retreat. Captured Greeks might have been sent to the new temple State of Yehud.

## **Yehouah or El?**

The Israelites had been wont to call their deity El Shadday before they knew the name Yahweh (*Ex 6:3*).

Some think that El worship will have fused easily with Yahwism.

B S J Isserlin, *The Israelites*

As long ago as the beginning of the twentieth century, H Gunkel, H Greissman and K Gallig showed that the three patriarchs, Abram, Isaac and Jacob, were associated with different places, respectively Judah, Edom and Israel, each associated with a different shrine and population. The altar set up by Abram at Shechem suggests that this was the site of the original shrine of the “returners”.

Jacob is not a Hebrew verb, though it is taken to mean “Yehouah or El Rewards”, but in Arabic its cognate means “to protest”. Jacob is described as grappling with God at the Jabbok river (*Gen* 32:24-29) or at Bethel (*Gen* 35:10) and was renamed Israel, an allegorical reference to the struggle between Yehouah worshippers and El worshippers in which Yehouah replaces El as the Almighty (El Shaddai) or the Highest (El Elyon). It is mentioned in *Hosea* 12:2-3. Jacob is a dialect form of Yehouah (“c”=“h”, “b”=“v”=“w”).

The story explains why Jacob was blessed by God and became Israel. The change of name explains why a country that worshipped Yehouah was called Israel, a name that refers to El as their god, though, conceivably, it is a relic of an early setback for the Yehouah faction before they ultimately succeeded. The original story of the return was centred on Israel as an appropriate name for all the followers of the god El. Actually, it is only a slightly altered aetiological explanation of the custom of swearing a bond by grasping the testicles, the origin of words like “testify” and “testament”. To touch the “hollow of his thigh” was to touch his testicles, a biblical euphemism (*Gen* 24:9).

Many of the Patriarchs seem to have worshipped El rather than Yehouah, though at different shrines—el-Betel (*Gen* 31:13; 35:7), el-Olam and el-Roi (*Gen* 21:33) and el-Elyon (*Gen* 14:13). El-Shaddai, el-Berith and baal-Berith also appear. Some Biblicists claim that such signs that Abraham and his descendants worshipped gods other than Yehouah shows antiquity. They take it that the worship of El, the Canaanite high god as discovered at Ugarit in fourteenth century tablets puts the Patriarchs back at least that far. Once again Biblicist arguments turn out to be special pleading. The early “returners” aimed to set up a religion based on El or Elyon as the God of Heaven, because that is what he was to the Canaanites, and these people deported from elsewhere in the Persian empire into Palestine will obviously have worshipped other gods different from Yehouah before they were resettled in Palestine. El was worshipped in Canaan for centuries, so long that El came simply to mean God. The Jacob stories seem to tell of the conversion of El worshippers at the sanctuaries of Peniel, Bethel and Shechem.

Yehouah was identified with El, the supreme god of the Canaanite pantheon... In many Semitic languages, the word “el” is both the name of a specific deity and the generic name for “god”.

G Garbini

Yaubidi, who appears in the Assyrian annals, also is recorded as Ilubidi. It suggests that “yau” and “ilu” might have been synonyms, both meaning God. Garbini highlights an inscription at Kirbet Beit Lei which read “yh yhw”, a mysterious phrase that turns up in *Isaiah* (12:2, 26:4) and translated Lord Yehouah. Here, if “yh” means god, the translation should be “the god, Yehouah”. If “yah” like “el” meant a god in general then the rivalry of Yehouah and El might stretch way back into second millennium Syria. The son challenged for the supremacy of the father from early on, and then there must have been rival factions since otherwise one or the other would have become supreme. In fact, it was the Persian colonists in Yehud who settled it in favour of Yehouah, perhaps after an early preference for El.

The Persians initially sent “returners” to worship El, that they took to be the local god, but later they switched to Yehouah. Both were Canaanite gods but they were to be changed into the image of Ahuramazda. This, much more convincingly, explains the biblical data than a childlike faith in the myths themselves when, under test, they leak like sieves.

Jacob also finally appears (*Gen* 48:22) as a warrior with a sword and bow conquering the Amorites (Canaanites), seemingly a euphemism for El worshippers. The Assyrians used the word Amurru for the people of the Levant—it meant “Westerners”. For Assyrians, it meant the same as the Hebrews, the people of Eber-nari. The bible uses the name for the natives of Canaan—as a synonym for Canaanites.

The Canaanite locals preferred their local Baal or Lord, a local son of El assigned to the people as their representative in the heavenly court. All nations had a son of El to represent them (*Dt* 32:8). The psalm in *Deuteronomy* 32 depicts the history of Israel as beginning with Yehouah assigned to Israel by the Most High in the assembly of “the sons of El”—not “the sons of Israel”, a desperate later effort to avoid embarrassment. Yehouah is clearly denoted as a lesser god than El, yet later he is the only god! The names of some of the tribes reflect the names of sons or daughters of El who were favoured by the local people at a local shrine.

It seems the Persian administrators decided, quite early, it would be easier to persuade the people of the hill country to accept Yehouah rather than El as the God of Heaven. Most Palestinians evidently were happier to compromise over the popular Baal called Yehouah than the remote high god called El. Thus it is that Yehouah is a son of El but nevertheless is the absolute God of Heaven! The appropriate name for a country where people worshipped Yehouah was Judah (Yehud). The condemnation of Israel’s apostasy, divine chastisement but the assurance of relief, and the punishment of Israel’s enemies reminds us of *Judges* 3:7-12:6, and the general purpose of the Deuteronomic Historian. *Deuteronomy* 32:8f is the first stage of the change of presidency of the divine court from El to Yehouah.

J Tigay has studied the theophoric names on inscribed seals and noted that the overwhelming majority honour Yehouah, none honour the goddesses, Astarte and Asherah, and though Baal does appear, since it is a title (Lord), it could mean Yehouah anyway. In Canaan generally, Baal was Hadad. The analysis revolves around proper dating of the seals, and, since Palestinian dating is a pig’s ear, that seems unlikely. One could argue a different hypothesis. If the use of Yehouah was made exclusive in the Persian period, then the analysis suggest the majority of these seals would be from that time. The name of any king never appears explicitly on these seals—though king’s names appear—perhaps because Yehud had no king. It was set up by the Persians as a theocracy, and the real king was the shah of Persia.

The J and E traditions detectable, particularly in *Genesis*, were the result of conflicts between the advocates of each of the two main Canaanite gods of Palestine, Yehouah and El. Each faction cast the justification myths for the new religion in terms of their preferred god using the myths of Mesopotamia they had been brought up with, and doubtless they were recited at the different shrines mentioned in the stories. Later the traditions were combined with the name of God accepted as Yehouah. Whether the word El was still retained in part for political reasons or whether it was re-introduced when the scriptures had to be reassembled from fragments is not clear.

## **Names and Places**

Abram and Abraham have been respectively interpreted as meaning "The Father is Exalted" and "The Father of a Multitude". Abram could mean "Father of a High Place", the High Places referring to Canaanite shrines, and the Father perhaps meaning a hierophant or priest, or maybe the god himself. Ramah was a town on the road to Jerusalem (*Josh* 18:25; *Jg* 4:5). It was a high place with a commanding view and used as a fortress. It was occupied by "returners" from captivity (*Ezra* 2:26; *Neh* 7:30;11:33)! An Egyptian text of the thirteenth century BC mentions two tribes in northern Palestine, the Tamaru and the Rahamu. The Rahamu could account for the name Abraham as "Father of the Rahamu". Yet there is a better explanation.

Abram's grandson was an Aramaean but, in terms of biblical chronology, Abram could not have been because his migration is supposed to have happened about a thousand years before any Aramaeans appeared in history. Abram could, however, have been an Aramaean if the "return" under the Persians was really the migration being referred to allegorically in the Patriarchal sagas.

Wherever the Aramaeans came from they were not called Aramaeans until they lived in the uphill regions of the Tur Abdin region of Mesopotamia, the source of the tributaries of the Euphrates. It is probably because they came to be associated with these highlands that they were called "Aramu" or "Highlanders". However, what is high is exalted, so their name is also read as the "Exalted Ones". Abram is therefore the "Father of the Aramu" meaning the "Father of the Highlanders", or, as the Biblicists would have it, the "Father of the Exalted Ones". Abram might have been a mythical founder of the Aramaeans before some of them were transported by the Persians to Palestine.

C H W Johns long ago published an Assyrian census of the Harran district, what he called an *Assyrian Doomsday Book*, the contents of a set of tablets from the seventh century BC, concerning the wealth and population of Harran and district. The main population of the city and its dependent villages, only about 200 years before the Persian conquest, was Aramaean.

The kinship of the Israelites and the Aramaeans can only have arisen in the first millennium BC and can be explained if the "returners", or some of them, came from these Aramaean cities of north Syria and north west Mesopotamia. The west Semitic names Abram, Jacob, Ishmael and Israel simply reflect the names popular in these Syrian places. The Aramaean city states in the early centuries of the final millennium BC were often at loggerheads and in alliances alternately. The myths of the monarchical period seem to be built on Assyrian records and shows these vacillations, though romanticized, to suit the purposes of the Persian mythmakers. Thus the "returners" could honestly accept a myth in which they are shown as migrating from their Aramaean homelands to be the founders of a Persian district, while the history created out of genuine Assyrian records can show the Aramaean states often in conflict.

Nor does Abraham mean a "Father of the Multitude". It is more likely to mean "The Wild Ox is our Father". The wild ox was a favourite symbol of the Assyrians who often pictured in in bas-relief on their monuments. It is depicted as being shaggy coated and therefore distinguishable from a domestic ox. It was hunted by the Assyrian kings and nobles who regarded it as a prize as good as a lion because it was so strong and fierce. A broken obelisk at Nineveh has the Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser I, boasting of destructive wild oxen that he slew at Ariziqi on the Euphrates, again in this Aramaean region. This is confirmed by his report on the same obelisk of a raid on the city of Shuppa in the land of Harran.



Of course, both Abram and Abraham can be read as beginning with the preposition Eber, “beyond”. They might simply be the “people beyond”, flattered into the “multitude beyond” because the remnant would be a multitude if they remained obedient. Abraham can, however, be read with less punning as “a sacred place beyond”, and that too is how the Promised Land was presented to the colonists. There is no reason why all of these puns could not have been intended and appreciated—it is the nature of these languages.

Rehum was a popular name among “returners” and might have referred to Aramu. Rehum is the name of a priestly family that returned with Zerubabel (*Neh* 12:13). A Rehum was a Levite building the walls and a leader of the people that signed the covenant with Nehemiah. It appears also many times among the “returners” of Ezra and Nehemiah as the variant “Harim”. Another variant is said to be Nehum (as in Nehemiah) meaning “compassion”. Thus the Rehum of *Ezra* 2:2 is the Nehum of *Nehemiah* 7:7. It seems to have been a Persian name because a Persian official of that name wrote an important letter to the Shahanshah to tell him to stop working on the temple (*Ezra* 4:8-9;17.23).

Some of the names in the story of Abram are the names of towns near Harran in the Assyrian district “beyond the river” (Eber-nari, Eber-niri) from the turn of the second millennium—places where the moon god, Sin, was worshipped. Garbini deduces that the Jews during their exile were sucking up to Nabonidus (who was confused with the Nebuchadnezzar of the bible in some instances) by writing a myth that would please the king and thus gain his favour. Nabonidus, though, did not seem the sort of king to try to impress. After restoring the temples of Ur and Harran devoted to his favourite god, Sin, he virtually abdicated while he spent years seeking antiquities, or pursuing the god Sin, in Arabia Deserta. His son Belshazzar is mistaken for the monarch in the bible because Nabonidus had effectively abandoned his duties. In short, Nabonidus was a crank, if not actually insane.

Nabonidus did not initiate the worship of the god, Sin, at Harran. Nabonidus, whose father was a governor of Harran, chose Harran as the centre of worship of the god, Sin, which he favoured. Sin was the local god of the city, but Nabonidus deported people there to institute the the worship of the god the way he wanted. He transported there people whose ancestors, he claimed, had been originally its inhabitants, and persuaded them that their proper god was Sin. He also rebuilt the ancient ziggurat of Ur, the temple of Sin, and made his daughter the High Priestess of the god.

In burningly hot climates, the cool and darkness of the evening comes as a relief. Darkness was seen as primal and light came out of it. This is the biblical order of creation. It means the original god was the god of the night—the moon. Other gods were secondary, including the sun! For people who followed a lunar calendar, the moon was also the god of time, and so therefore was Sin. Three stelae found at Harran in the 1950s had been erected by Nabonidus declaring Sin to be the “king of the gods”. Expressed in more Persian style of words, this would be “god of gods” and “lord of lords”.

The connexion of the “returners” with Nabonidus is that the Persian colonists of Yehud came from these cities in northern Syria—Harran and Urfa—that devoted themselves to Sin. Terah, Laban, Sarah and Milcah are all names associated with the moon. The implications are that the “returners” from Babylon came from these districts in Syria—places where the god worshipped was the great god Sin, the Semitic moon god, the precursor of Allah and evidently the precursor of Yehouah in the sense that the “returners” came from these places where Sin was worshipped. Their biblical myth was actually a somewhat allegorized account of their travels from Harran to Yehud as colonists, but set in the distant past to give them a spurious history.

Harran seems to have been the home of Abram (*Gen* 12:1,4), not Ur, though Ur, according to Cyrus Gordon, was the nearby town later called Edessa (Urfa) but which was called Urfu, at that time, not the Ur near the junction of the two rivers much further south. Apollonius Molo, even in the first century BC, tells a different story about the origin of Abraham from *Genesis*. The Patriarch was born in the mountainous edges of Syria, fringing on the northern steppes, after his ancestors had fled from Armenia. This description fits the same place—it is the neighbourhood of Urfa and Harran, a place known as Beth Eden (Bit Adini)! Biblicists have always known where Eden was, but they did not care to say.

Pseudo-Eupolemus, seeming to speak of *Genesis* 14, says the enemies are not Mesopotamian but Armenian. Both Philo and Josephus refer to this *Genesis* passage but they place it in Assyria, both adding a detail not now in the bible but which must once have been well known. That the biblical setting in the Arabah by the Dead Sea is wrong is suggested by Abraham abusing the enemies of Dan and Hobab, both north of Damascus. Garbini says other old chroniclers also made Abraham a king in Syria. Nicolaus of Damascus, for example, Herod's historian, said Abraham was the fourth king of Damascus and Israel its fifth king.

Though European and American schoolchildren continue to be taught that Abraham came from Ur in southern Mesopotamia, people in the area know that the birthplace of Abraham was Urfa. We can read in *Harpers and Queen* magazine in a travel piece on south eastern Turkey by the travel writer, Philip Marsden, that "the birthplace of Abraham, Urfa, is sacred, like Jerusalem, to the three monotheistic religions of the region—Judaism, Christianity and Islam".

Ur of "the Chaldees" is a misreading of the Hebrew—Ur Chasdiyim—meaning "Ur of the Holy Ones". The word "Ur" was simply Sumerian for city, and the word lived on in Semitic languages, though the Sumerians had long gone. So, if the meaning "city" was still understood by the word Ur, "Ur of the Chaldees" could have simply meant "City of the Holy Ones". If this Ur really was the old Sumerian City, it was a centre of the worship of the moon god, Sin, as was Harran.

Jacob, declared in the scriptures to have been a wandering Aramaean, returns to his kinfolk in Harran, presumably after 1000 BC since the Aramaeans were not there before then—probably not before the ninth century BC. Isaac and Jacob both return east for their wives because Zoroastrians and therefore the "returners" from "exile" had to do so to get wives of their own faith, again showing that the circumstances applied to the fifth not the eighteenth century BC. Ezra is most definite that worshippers of Yehouah could not have Canaanite wives, and those that had were made to abandon them. Why should displaced Canaanites returning to their own homeland be denied the chance of marrying wives of their own race? The ban was not ethnic but religious—Zoroastrian.

The traditions concerning Yehouah in the scriptures are contradictory. Yehouah was God even before the Flood (*Gen* 4:26 (J)) but God first revealed his name to Moses (*Ex* 3 (E) and *Ex* 6 (P)). Elsewhere, the Patriarchs used to worship other gods:

Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. (*Josh* 24:2)

Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. (*Josh 24:14*)

The people were being cajoled into putting away the “other gods” that their fathers had “served”. Joshua is saying this about 1200 BC in the myth and the fathers being referred to are the Patriarchs supposedly from 1800 BC, but it all applies far better to the natives of Palestine being asked by the Persian administrators—the returners—to accept the Persian God. If more proof is needed and proof too of dishonest translation intended to mislead, the Assyrian expression Ebir-nari appears again in Hebrew (Eberhanahar) but is translated as “beyond the flood” in both these passages. Joshua is really saying that their fathers lived in a particular part of the world called (in Assyria) “beyond the river”. Note that Abraham’s brother’s name is Nachor (Nahor), Flood or River! Sure enough in this district we find the places he mentions!

The “returners” had at some previous stage had “other gods” but had been told by the Persians that their true god was Yehouah and had been obliged to convert and proceed to Palestine as a new privileged priestly and administrative class. On arrival, they were missionaries to the native Israelites who were depicted as apostates to the true Yehouah that the “returners” had brought with them—the God of Heaven. Coming from Harran, their god had been Sin!

The indirect way the God of the Patriarchs is often referred to suggests they had different gods from Yehouah but, instead of being named, they are called “the god of my father” (*Gen 31:5; Ex 15:2*), “the god of your (his) father” (*Gen 31:29; 46:1; 50:17*), “your god and the god of your father” (*Gen 43:23*), “the god of Abraham and the god of Nahor” (*Gen 31:53*), “the god of your father Abraham and your father Isaac” (*Gen 28:13*), “the god of your father Abraham” (*Gen 26:24*). Elsewhere (*Gen 31:42, 53*), Jacob swore by “the terror (or fear) of Isaac his father” where “terror” seems to be a mistranslation of a word that really means family god or tribal god. Another circumlocution for the name of the god is “the mighty one of Jacob” (*Gen 49:24*).

Some Assyrian texts have references to Assur, the Assyrian national god—possibly the model for Ahuramazda at least in iconography—but also to “the god of your father”. It seems to be a polite way of referring in general to anyone’s personal or family god in a society in which there were many. Assur was everyone’s god in Assyria but they had personal gods too. This might have been the initial system used by the “returners”, allowing a degree of retention of earlier gods while people were weaned on to the local Assur—Yehouah. In a generation, of course, “the god of your father” would come to mean the adopted god.

## Hebrew?

The word “Hebrew” is taken to be synonymous with “Israelite” and “Jew”, but the scholars cannot decide what it means or why it came into usage when these people already have two names. The Hebrews must have lived in Palestine when Abraham and Jacob and their families were nomads. In *Genesis 14:13*, the word Hebrew occurs in the bible for the first time in a reference to “Abram the Hebrew”. Then Joseph explains that he had been abducted from “the land of the Hebrews” (*Gen 40:15*). Hebrews are normally equated with the Israelites who escape from Egypt. Yet, in *1 Samuel 14:21*, the Hebrews side with the Philistines against the Israelites, but then swap sides! Hebrews were obviously not necessarily Israelites. Hebrew was the name of the people of whom Abram and Joseph were a part confirming that it was in use hundreds of years before the Exodus, if the

biblical chronology is to be believed. The alternative is that these are anachronistic usages in *Genesis* showing a later date of composition than usually believed.

“Apiru” or, in Egyptian, “pr”, is a word found in the El Amarna letters, referring to raiders of the Egyptian colonies in Canaan and thought by some to be the invading Israelites. They say therefore that “Apiru” is the origin of the word “Hebrew”. But why then is the term Hebrew never found in *Joshua* and *Judges* in which the entry and settlement of the “Hebrews” into Canaan—long after the word “Apiru” first appeared in history—is described in detail?

The reason is the derivation of Hebrew is not from “Apiru” but from “eber” meaning “beyond” or “across” the “nahar”, the shores or banks of The River—the shores or banks of the Euphrates—and was not used until after *Joshua* and *Judges* had been written! This was the view of T C Mitchell writing in Leonard Cottrell’s *Concise Encyclopedia of Archaeology* fifty years ago. Needless to say, the Hebrews were the people who lived in Eber-niri, Eber hanahara or Abarnahara. When Abram is called “the Hebrew” in *Genesis* 14:13, the *Septuagint* renders it as “Perates”, meaning Euphrates. In other words the translators of *Genesis* into Greek knew that Eber had something to do with crossing the river Euphrates. Egyptian ‘pr, Babylonian Hapiru/Habiru, Hebrew Eber/Ibri all refer to the river Euphrates, in the sense of those who have crossed it. It is as clear an indication we shall get that people over 2000 years ago connected Hebrew with crossing the river Euphrates. The word “Hebrew” refers to people that lived in the Persian satrapy of Abarnahara, literally “Beyond the River to the Persians”, an administrative unit of the Persian empire not set up until the fifth century BC.

“Eber” can also mean the opposite bank or shore and the hinterland beyond. The expression, Eber-niri, appears in *1 Kings* 14:15 where the Israelites would be scattered by God “beyond the river” for apostasy—a suggestion that they would be transported back whence they came. In *Isaiah* 7:20, the same expression is used to designate a country of the king of Assyria, across the river to those looking from the west. In *Numbers* 24:24, Eber is used as an equal or parallel of Ashur! They are respectively the west and east banks of the Euphrates. Possibly the name of the province of Abarnahara was an ancient one, and then so too would the name Hebrew be. That would allow the Egyptians, and Hittites, people who lived on the west banks to call invaders from the east who crossed the river, the “Apiru” or “Habiru”. The expression “Ebir-niri” meaning “beyond the river” was the Assyrian diplomatic designation of the regions west of the Euphrates—“beyond the river” to the Assyrians, who lived further east on the banks of the Tigris.

In Hittite texts, Habiru served the conquerors, the Hittite kings. The references in the El Amarna letters to the raids of Habiru have been noted and Apiru were still evident in the time of Rameses IV. But “Habiru” also appears in Babylonian tablets before Hammurabi, a half a millennium earlier. They are also mentioned in the Mari tablets of the time of Zimri-lim, a contemporary of Hammurabi. Other tablets from Arrapha, east of the Euphrates, says that Habiru sold themselves into slavery there.

Ebrum was the third and greatest of the six kings of the Ebla dynasty between 2400 and 2250 BC. Sargon I, the Great, of Akkad, after a punitive expedition in which Ebla was subjugated, put Ebrum on the throne of Ebla as a puppet, but after Sargon died (c 2310 BC), Ebrum reduced Akkad’s cities to vassalage. Only sixty years later in 2250 did Sargon’s grandson, Narum-Sin (Narum-Suen), reconquer Ebla and burn it down. It is unlikely to be coincidence that Ebrum means Eber, the eponymous founder of the Hebrews, suggesting that Sargon gave him the title of the name of the province, just as British nobility have the name of their demesne. Eber

might have meant “beyond” (the Euphrates river) even in those days just as it did later. So Ebrum was the name given him by Sargon after the place he ruled. It was not his birth name.

So, the mention of Hebrews might not be conclusive of a late date, but we are left with the puzzle of why it was not used in books like *Joshua* and *Judges* that might have been expected to use the word, if it was earlier. The solution might be that Eber was a general name for anyone crossing the river—a name for transients from the east of any racial group but seen as undesirable and disruptive until the Persians began to use it exclusively for the settled people in their province of Abarnahara.

The region meant by the Assyrian expression was the region where the modern boundary of Syria and Turkey is cut by the river Euphrates. Several major tributaries of the Euphrates as well as its main channel and several rivers running into the Mediterranean, make this the lands of the “banks of the rivers” which might be the best interpretation of Eber-nari. It is the same region near Urfa and Harran, important for Abram and his children!

Harran was the centre of Paddan Aram (*Gen* 28:2) as is known from inscriptions and Tell Feddan remains near Harran into modern times. Til Nahiri was another ancient town nearby identifiable with Nahor. The Assyrian census confirming that the area was occupied by Aramaeans has been mentioned.

Arpachshad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah (*Gen* 10:22; 11:10; *1 Chr* 1:17), is nothing less than Persia, and Arpachshad’s grandson is Eber, the founder of the Hebrews in this legend. The descendents of Eber were these places near Harran whence Abram began his “return” to Canaan.

## Chaldaeans

The patriarchal tales are propaganda. From the outset, Abram’s wanderings under God’s guidance would result in a great nation—in reality reflecting the Persian nation not the Jewish one. But the Persian administrators were flattering to deceive the people of the Hill Country of Palestine that they hoped to secure as loyal allies against their southern neighbour, the mighty and rebellious Egypt.

Dr Manfred Barthel, a German popularizer of biblical discoveries, can write, in *What the Bible Says*, this paragraph characterizing biblical “scholars”:

Abraham is the first historical figure who appears in the *Old Testament*. No scholar seriously doubts that there actually was such a person, even though there is not a single piece of independent evidence to prove that he ever existed.

So, we read Dr S H Hooke in *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* writing:

There is no good reason for denying the existence of Abram as a historical person.

Have we any good reasons for denying the existence of Horatio Hornblower as a historical person? Well, of course we have but would we have in 3000 years time? Horatio Hornblower is fictional even if he seems to be recognisable in Horatio Nelson. The historian as opposed to the apologist will ask what reason we have to believe that Abram was historical and not mythical, and would have to agree with Barthel that there is none.

The expression “Ur of the Chaldees” is itself anachronistic, because Babylonians seem not to have been called Chaldaeans in Ur in the second millennium BC—it was New Babylonian language from a thousand years later when the Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians were interested in transporting people to pacify their conquests. The route of Abram *did* mean something to the people that the Persians transported into Judah on the pretence that they were being “returned” to their original home! It was the route *they* took to Canaan, not any Amorite Abram a thousand years before.

Chaldees or Chaldaeans is the translation of the biblical name (Kasdim) of the people of Babylonia, and their astrologer-priests. Curiously no less than 46 of the 88 mentions of the Kasdim in the scriptures occur in *Jeremiah*, eight are in *2 Kings* and another eight are in *Ezekiel*. These are unquestionably meant to signify the Babylonians because they are used often in poetic couplets in which Babylonian equals Chaldaean. Daniel has eleven occurrences but at least eight are references to the Chaldaeans as Magi. Chaldee, the language of parts of *Ezra* and *Daniel*, was thought for a long time to have been their language, but that is simply a crude form of Persian chancellery Aramaic.

So we are left with a people, a presumed language and a priesthood that do not match the place where they were supposed to have existed. Yet historians have accepted what the bible says and have got themselves in the usual twist. Their response is a sort of historical equivalent of the archaeologist’s “disturbed strata”. They simply say that the origins of the Chaldaeans is uncertain, then proceed to give it. What they mean is that they do not know, but they are happy to give you a plausible guess. In a while these plausible guesses are accepted as fact, and the scholars think they have discovered something!

Their guess here is that the Chaldaeans were Semites from the Arabian peninsula who for many centuries, if not millennia, insidiously infiltrated, and occasionally raided, Babylonia until they were able to take it over from the Assyrians. *Lutterworth’s Dictionary of the Bible* (*sub voce* “Chaldaeans”) says the word Chaldaean was used to replace the expression “Sea-Land” from the ninth century BC—but the Sea-Land was still being called the Sea-Land in a copy of the *Dynastic Chronicles* being used in the reign of Ashurbanipal (c 650 BC).

Nebopolassar (625-605 BC) founded the neo-Babylonian dynasty, and passed the throne to his energetic and successful son, Nebuchadrezzar II (604-562 BC), who captured Jerusalem. This neo-Babylonian empire is what the bible terms Chaldaean. Consequently these kings are considered to have been Chaldaean, but there is not a shred of independent evidence that they were. The country seems to have been called Kaldu, but it is an assumption based on the bible that it was because some tribe called Chaldaeans had taken over the kingdom. The truth is that no evidence has been found under these kings of any distinction between part of the population called Chaldaeans and another part called Babylonians. They wrote in only one language, doubtless supposed by the ignorant to have been Chaldaean, but it was the language that had been used in Mesopotamia by Babylonians and Assyrians for centuries. Professor John D Prince who was an expert on languages at Columbia University tells us that “no perceptible differences existed” between Chaldaeans and Babylonians, and their language “differed in no way from the ordinary Semitic Babylonian idiom which was practically identical with that of Assyria”.

The origin of the word “Chaldaean” is equally fanciful. It is supposedly from the root “kasadu” meaning “conquer”, supposedly because they conquered Babylon. Yet the Assyrians were writing about “Kaldu” three centuries



before Babylonia was conquered. If the root was “conquer”, it cannot have been because they conquered Babylonia. Since the consonant change had already been made at the time of Adad-nirari III (811-782 BC), they must have conquered Babylonia even before because this Assyrian king already seemed to regard Babylonia as “Kaldu!”

Some early connexion with an actual Chaldaea is claimed when a rebel, Mardukabiliddinna (biblical Merodach-baladan), rose up against the Assyrian kings Sargon II (722-705 BC) and Sennacherib (705-681 BC), managing to gain control of Babylonia twice (721-710 BC and briefly in 703 BC). The connexion is that this man from the small city of Bit Yakin in the very south of Mesopotamia was called by Sargon both the “king of Bit Yakin” and the “king of Chaldaea”. So was Bit Yakin the capital of Chaldaea? Or was it simply that the king of Bit Yakin became the king of Chaldaea? One trouble with identifying Bit Yakin with Chaldaea came from Sargon’s successor, Sennacherib, who distinguished the Arabs of the desert and Aramaeans from the Chaldeans, yet our modern historians say they were indeed Arabs. What is more, when Assyria fell to the neo-Babylonian monarchs, it too was included in Kaldu!

There is an alternative to the identification of Chaldaean with “conquer”. It is that it comes from the root “*chesed*” (“*hasid*”) meaning “pious” or “holy”. The Chaldaeans were the Hasidim, the Holy Ones. The later Hasids of second century Judaea will have chosen the term especially for its meaning and its association with Babylon whence came Judaism originally. The hasids wanted a return to pure worship—that of the Persians not the Hellenized priesthood of the Sadducees.

For long, Babylonia was the country of temples. All the great cities of Babylonia had temples and were sacred places, so that the whole of Babylonia was thought of as holy, but especially after the legends of the creation and the rise of Marduk to the kingship of heaven had become elaborated. This explains why the Babylonians were also called the Chaldaeans—they were the Holy or Pious People. The chief city in renown and importance was Babylon, where the prime temple was Esagila, “the temple of the high head”, with a shrine called “the temple of the foundation of heaven and earth”.. This building was called by Nebuchadnezzar “the temple-tower of Babylon”, and is better known as the biblical “Tower of Babel”.

“*Chesed*” seems a particularly good root for the word as applied to priests, but it offers terrible problems to those historians who have already decided that the Chaldaeans were a tribe of scallies from Arabia. How did the scallies get to be the priests? Classical authors such as Herodotus (fifth century BC), Strabo and Diodorus (both first century BC) use the word to mean priests and astronomers, and, we saw the author of *Daniel* did too, writing in the second century BC.

Biblicists are familiar, of course, with the idea of tribal people being appointed *en masse* to the priesthood. The caste of Levites supposedly emerged from a tribe of Israelites who showed a particular inclination to stand up for God. It is myth, but conceivably based on the myth devised by the Chaldaean priests that they derived from a tribe. The classical writers called the Magi of Iran a tribe too. Rather than seeing pious tribes being elevated in society by their devotion, it is safer to see the classical writers using the word tribe as synonymous with caste. The point about a tribe is that it is a group of related families and that is just what these ancient castes were. Their jobs—here the priesthood—in each case were passed on by hereditary.

Xenophon (*Anabasis*) says that there were Chaldaeans by the Black Sea:

These troops were Armenian and Mardian and Chaldaean mercenaries belonging to Orontas and Artuchas. The last of the three, the Chaldaeans, were said to be a free and brave set of people. They were armed with long wicker shields and lances... There have been tribes like the Carduchians, the Taochians, the Chaldaeans, which, albeit they were not subject to the great king, yet were no less formidable than independent... Then some independent tribes—the Carduchians or Kurds, and Chalybes, and Chaldaeans, and Macrones, and Colchians, and Mossynoecians, and Coetians, and Tibarenians.

It is a long way from the south of Iraq, so who were these northern Chaldaeans? Professor Carl F Lehmann-Haupt of Innsbruck explains that the people of Urartu (Hebrew Ararat, Van) called themselves Chaldini (a plural), and worshipped a god called Chaldi (Kasdi). It must be that the Black Sea Chaldaeans were these same people. The Urartians lived where the Hurrians used to live, and had a similar language. They will have been Hurrians, Urartu being the same word as Hurru. These mountain dwellers built fortresses on high crags throughout the highlands north of Assyria. They were excellent builders in stone, were economically strong, and worked well in bronze.

Urartu was what is now Armenia, a country that covers Armenia itself and parts of Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Much of it is where the modern Kurds live, and the Kurds are the direct line of the people who lived there then, although interbred with subsequent peoples. The Gutu or Kuti lived in the middle reaches of the Tigris about 2000 BC, in Sumerian times, and were related apparently to the Kassites who lived to the east on the edge of the Iranian plateau. The Assyrian name of them, Kirtie, evolved into Kardi. The name of Babylonia used in the Amarna letters is Karduniash. The Armenians crossed the Caucasus in about 600 BC, pushing the Chaldians to the south so that they lived in what is now Kurdistan. The word “Kurd” is “Kald” with another common consonantal change.

British Museum catalogues seemed to be determined not to mention the Chaldians of Urartu, and bundle them together in descriptions as “the northern tribes”, while Assyriologists happily speak of Chaldaeans and Babylonians being in coalition when they otherwise consider them as the same people. It is like saying the Yankees and the Americans were allies.

Before the Chaldian country was called Urartu-Chaldia, it was called Naïri, a name that is suspiciously similar to the word Nahor meaning river. It suggests it was, or included, Aram-naharaim, the home of the patriarchs. A king of Urartu was actually called Aramu and fought Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC). A seated figure of this Assyrian king found at Ashur listed his conquests in “Akkad and Kaldu”.

Boris Piotrovski (*The Ancient Civilization of Urartu*, 1969) says that in the 700s BC the Chaldians ruled most of north Syria, meaning that Urfa and Harran were under Chaldian influence and probably had Chaldians among their populations. Tiglath-pileser defeated a coalition of north Syrian states under the the Chaldian king Sardur II at Commagene. Sardur fled to his mountain fortress at Van while the Aramaean states including Israel according

860-840—Aramu  
835-824—Sardur I  
824-810—Ispuini  
810-786—Menua  
786-764—Argsti I  
764-735—Sardur II  
735-714—Rusa  
(Ursa) I  
684-640—Rusa  
(Ursa) II  
640-620—Sardur III

**Kings of Urartu  
(dates approximate)**

to the bible (2 *Kings* 15-16) and Damascus were severely punished.

A Chaldian king called Ispiuni fought Adad-nariri and was successful enough to be able to found a Chaldean colony at Musasir, near Lake Urmia where he set up a stele. Urartu was the center of metal artwork from 900 to 650 BC. About this time, the Persians lived in this area, and were associated with these Chaldeans. Persian art and architecture were forever influenced by this contact. The Urartians were the master canal builders, and portions of their great projects still remain. The Persians became experts on building subterranean canals and irrigation ducts, and either learnt these skills when they and the Urartians were neighbours, or they employed Urartian engineers.

A Chaldian king Rusus I built a new capital city and schemed against Sargon II. Here is where myth and history meet. Rusus formed a coalition against Sargon, and who should be among the allies but Mardukabaliddinna whom Sargon called a "king of the land of Chaldaeans". Such confederations were a feature of resistance to the Assyrians, and are mentioned in the bible.

Rusus was successful and erected a stele which was deliberately broken by Sargon in a later attack, but was restored by Rusus II. Rusus eventually was killed or committed suicide when faced with attacks on two fronts from the wild Scythian tribe of Cimmerians coming across the Caucasus and Sargon planning to return to the fray (714 BC). Rusus II cleverly employed the Cimmerians to help him fight Esarhaddon (680-668 BC), but they were then allowed to pass through the land to the Anatolian plateau, where they became the biblical Gomer, showing, at least, that *Genesis* could not have been written before this time.

Esarhaddon's predecessor, Sennacherib, erected many stelae giving details of his campaigns, many of which were against the allies. His first campaign in 703 was against that same Mardukkabaliddinna who had been deposed as king of Babylon by Sargon in 710 BC. The rebel reformed the coalition with Elam, Aribi, and Judah, but was defeated in less than a year. Sennacherib then fought the Medes, and the Kassites to the east (whose god was called Kaspi, compare Caspian Sea), the Cilicians, the Sidonians and Palestine to the west, sieging the Jerusalem of Hezekiah, the tribes of Urartu to the north-west, subjugated the marsh Arabs (considered as the Chaldaeans), crossed the Persian gulf in pursuit of these rebels, and subjugated the rebellious Elamites and Babylonians. It does not seem unreasonable that this was a continuous punitive campaign against the countries that had allied against Assyria.

Ashurbanipal (668-626 BC) was also confronted by the confederates. A ten sided prism dated to 636 BC gives an account of his early campaigns which include a defeat of Elam, one of the allies, in his fifth campaign and in his sixth campaign he fought a confederacy of Elam, the Arabs of the desert, Babylon and the Chaldaeans. Now Babylon was ruled by his own brother, Shamashshumukin, at the wish of their father Esarhaddon, and he had risen against his brother with the allies, yet Babylon is distinguished from Chaldaea, among the allies, and the Chaldaeans are plainly not the Arabs of the desert. Babylon was crushed and the king went on in further campaigns to destroy Elam and reduce the Arab tribes that had been part of the coalition. Moreover, an eight sided prism covers much the same ground as the later ten-sided one, but speaks of the submission of Rusas. One of these coalitions will have been in the author's mind when, in *Genesis*, the four kings attack the five cities. The Chaldeans seemed to ally with the Medes when Cyrus went to subdue the Lydians (28 May 585 BC) on the river Halys. They then remained loyal members of the Persian empire, sheltering many conquered Medes and Persians when the empire fell. *Jeremiah* 51:27-28 gloatingly describes the coalition against Babylon of the

Medes, Manni, Urartians and Scythians. Jeremiah knew about this coalition in 539 BC, so his book was written later than this date.

Linguistically and culturally the Chaldeans were different from the Semites and the Indo-Europeans, though they obviously mixed with many of the latter coming across the mountains from the north, and ultimately with the Medes, and their language was said to be a dialect of Hurrian. Their closest cultural ties were with the Cretans and with the Etruscans.

Were these the Chaldaeans?

The scholars say “No”, but there is a clear possible point of confusion in the time of Sargon, when the king’s scribe could have mistaken the ally of the Chaldeans, Mardukabaliddinna, as a Chaldean himself. The word Chaldaean, derived from “*chesed*” and applied to the priests and people of Babylonia, did not mean the Chaldeans as a people, simply describing the nature of the Babylonians themselves and their priestly caste as pious, but the biblical authors confused the two.

The biblical authors confused them, but the link was the place of origin of the colonists into Yehud. They came from Urfa and Harran, places that were in the sphere of influence of the Chaldeans of Urartu. It has to be considered whether “Ur of the Chaldees” actually was Urfa, a city that could quite easily have been held by the Chaldeans for parts of its history. James H Platt in the *Oxford Companion to the Bible* says that the identification of Ur of the Chaldees with the Ur in Sumer, “is not universally accepted”, and that “some scholars have suggested it is Urfa”. He adds that Chaldaeans were one of five tribes that only became dominant in the late sixth century, implying that these “tribes” were castes, and Chaldaean must be identified with Magi.

Moreover, Ur, which normally means a city, took that meaning from the walls—it is a walled city or a fortress, properly. Because cities were small states that held land outside the walls, Ur came also to mean a “land” or “country”. It seems that the country of Agade, north of Babylon was called Uri—“The Land”—just as Israel is in the bible, and this seems to coincide with Aram-naharaim, at least in part. Eusebius refers to Ur as Urie. “Ur of the Chaldees” could convincingly simply mean “the country of the Chaldeans”—Urartu. Artu looks like the Indo-European word for Order and Truth, which would mean the name of the country could have been read as the “Land of Truth”, a name that would have impressed Zoroastrians, and inclined the Medes to favour the Chaldeans.

Mesopotamia is a Greek word meaning “between the rivers”, today taken to mean the whole of the country called Iraq because of the two great rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris that define it. That was not its original Greek meaning, though. For Alexander’s generals, it was the northern part of the country, from roughly Seleucia or Ctesiphon—the point of narrowing between the rivers—to the Anatolian plateau which is their source. In other words, it covers the Syrian plain where the cities of Urfa and Harran are situated. The biblical translators are inconsistent as usual in often translating as Mesopotamia what is written “Aram-naharaim”, Aram of the rivers, but sometimes using the words untranslated as if they were a name, and sometimes translating them more or less literally as “Syria of the Rivers” or “Syria of Mesopotamia” (*Septuagint*). Nicolas of Damascus, a historian of the time of Herod and one of the sources used by Josephus, claims that Abram was a king of Damascus, a city in Syria. Justin Martyr had heard the same story. J W Rogerson, in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* openly declares that Mesopotamia is “the equivalent geographical name” as Aram-naharaim. Stephen M

Hooker, in the *Lutterworth Dictionary of the Bible* explains that the area meant by the name Aram-naharaim was the region between the Euphrates and the river Khabur, the precise place of origin of the family of Abraham.

In the apocryphal *Book of Judith*, Mesopotamia occurs three times, all in the potted history of the Jews given by Achior (*Jud* 5). The Jews are described as being descended from the Chaldaeans, who were polytheists, but the Chaldaeans worshipped the God of Heaven, and were obliged to leave their home and move to Mesopotamia. This God of Heaven is Yehouah and he then ordered them to go to Canaan where they settled and prospered.

This story was written when there was no ambiguity about the word Mesopotamia—in Hasmonaean times, when the Holy Ones or Hasids had come into Judah from Babylon. It meant the plain of Syria, so the Jews moved to the plain of Syria from Chaldaea. It seems much more likely that the Chaldaea meant was the one otherwise known as Urartu or Ararat than that it was another Chaldaea hundreds of miles south in the marshes by the Persian gulf. Perhaps these holy Chaldaeans became the caste of Babylonia priests and some went to Yehud. So the colonists of Jerusalem—or some of them—might have been Chaldians from Harran, Urfa or even Urartu itself, placed in the privileged position of guardians of the new temple state. If others were Chaldaean priests (Magi) from Babylon, there is a basis for the confusion of later biblical authors.

- ❑ Harran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees (*Gen* 11:28).
- ❑ Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Harran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Harran, and dwelt there (*Gen* 11:31).
- ❑ And he said unto him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it (*Gen* 15:7).

The Urartu-Chaldians were fond of the winged solar disc, the serpent, and bison in their art, and seemed to worship trees. Images of trees were guarded by various supernatural beings and beasts. The tree appeared on personal seals on Urartian correspondence, bronze cups, warriors' bronze belts and helmets, monoliths throughout the land, and wall paintings and carved columns in palaces. The biblical legend of the fall of Adam might be Urartian.

What we seem to have are foundation legends of people from north Syria, around the modern city of Edessa—Urfu (Ur) and Harran—who were resettled in the Palestine hills. These people were Aramaeans but included Chaldians from Urartu, the country that had ruled them for a century or two, when Urfa was “Ur of the Chaldees”. Ancient stories about a real king Ebrum, over 1000 years before, were mythologized into a foundation myth of the people “across the river” (Eber-nari), and was taken by the deportees into Yehud when the Persians transported them into Palestine.

## **Ur to Canaan**

The false chronology of the bible puts Abram's migration 850 years before the monarchy, about 1800 BC. Some aspects of the story militate against such a date and none can be said unequivocally to confirm it. To accept

the chronology of the scriptures is to accept the impossibly long lives of the early human beings. No doubt Christian and Jewish “scholars” will do this, but since the chronology is plainly symbolic, there is no need to.

For most of the third millennium BC, Canaanite and Syrian society was urban with magnificent Bronze Age cities, but, in the second millennium, the city structure collapsed and the people took to pastoralism. Abram’s story gives little indication of the existence of fortified cities or of a crisis causing their demise, unless it is *Genesis* 14, which looks more like an insertion to establish Abraham as a man of substance. For harmonizing apologists, the supposed Amorite invasion provided a convenient hook to the biblical story of the Patriarchs. Biblicists have associated Abram with this supposed movement of nomadic Amorites from Mesopotamia to Canaan early in the second millennium BC. W F Albright devised a series of refined classifications for the ancient Near East Bronze Age to suite his presuppositions about the Patriarchs.

There is some evidence of a change in culture in Palestine in the early second millennium, innovations from Syria being noted, and Egyptian texts speak of movements of Asiatics called the “Amu”, identified as Amorites. The Egyptian *Execration Texts* also mention princes of roving and settled bands of people with Amoritic names. However the cultural changes are not so sudden that they could not have occurred by evolution or adoption rather than by invasion, or a crisis such as urban collapse.

The Amu of the Egyptian texts seem to be the Egyptian name of a people permanently residing in the desert areas who took advantage of Egyptian weakness, from time to time, to move in, but otherwise kept a healthily respectful distant but friendly relationship with Egypt. They might have been the Amorites in their Arabian homeland. A movement into Palestine and Syria from this area is not impossible and might have happened. The context might be congenial but it is not exclusive.

Bedouin tribes have lived in the area until modern times and any such chief could have served as the model of a nomadic founding father, but cannot be identified with the movement of a single family under Abram from Chaldaea. The fact remains that the story of Abraham does not fit the model. He was living with his own father as a family settled, not nomadic, in Ur, then deliberately moved to Harran, again settling so that it became the family’s new home, then again deliberately moving to Palestine to settle again after having a look at Egypt.

These movements are usually explained by Christians because the Patriarchs were semi-nomads following the seasonal pastures for their flocks, but not wandering freely, instead staying near towns so that before long they settled down like Lot and his family. It sounds convincing but anthropologists have found that pastoral nomads evolve from settled farmers not the other way round. Pastoralism evolves in marginal agricultural areas as an insurance against crop failure, which is not uncommon, since otherwise farming in such difficult country would be risky. The herds saw the farm through bad cereal years but otherwise the combination offered a greater variety of diet.

If any Amorite movements happened, they seem to have been only movements from the rural steppelands into the settled urban areas of the city states. Rather than migrating from Ur to Harran, the migrants seem to have migrated into Ur, Harran and other cities in Mesopotamia and Canaan. The Amorite invasions were simply a collapse of the urban economy—probably an ecological collapse caused by overintensive farming that forced a return to pastoralism when the soil eroded and degraded, and was unable to support the populations of the city states. This phase is now considered the final period of the Early Bronze Age—EBIV.



Some apologists have pointed to the use of tents as proof of nomadism but tents were commonly used by settled people in these times and were actually used for shelter more in the first millennium BC than in the second, according to Van Seters. Nor were the possession of flocks and asses any sign of nomadism. It should not need saying that settled people had flocks and asses as well as nomads. Only settled populations had slaves, nomads being travelling families, all related. Lest there be more argument, let the Jews and Christian believers read the contract between the Hebrews and the nomadic Ishmaelites (*Gen* 16:12;20:15;21:20-21) which shows the Hebrews as the settled population.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?**  
**Patriarchs Or “Returners?” (Part II)**

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### **No Contemporary References**

George W Ramsey (*The Quest for the Historical Israel*) says:

Outright verification of the patriarchal stories is hardly to be expected. The happenings narrated in these stories are simply not the kind which would likely find mention in any public record.

Indeed they are not, because they are apparently personal stories, that could not have been seen as matters of state at the time. But this professor of Presbyterian Christianity whose book is as fair a survey as you will get from a Christian, cannot see that they are actually in the most public record that has ever been published, though they should not be. Believers will say it is God’s finger at work stirring human affairs once more, but reasonable people will see them as myths. The very point Ramsey makes classifies these stories as myths.

*Genesis* has no contemporary references. The names of Pharaohs are not given in the stories of Abram and Joseph, so offer no clues as to dates. T L Thompson and J van Seters have independently shown that nothing identifiable in the way of place names, ethnic groups, or individuals pertain to the period before the monarchy. None of the events of the Patriarchs or the Exodus can be found in ancient texts or in the earth. There is no archaeological proof of any migration into Canaan at that time, the evidence for any migration of Amorites is flimsy and Abram is not a nomad but a man who deliberately uproots himself—once and for all, not regularly—at God’s command!

Beersheba, Hebron, Shechem, Bethel and other places in the Promised Land did not exist as early as the supposed second millennium migrations. Some other places existed but were deserted at this time and were not reoccupied until the first millennium. The time when they were all occupied simultaneously was the first millennium. We have to conclude that none of the detail is traceable exclusively to the second millennium, and much of it demands a knowledge of later history. *Genesis* could have just as easily have been written in 500 BC and reflecting only the conditions as they were then known.

The allusions to later history in the patriarchal stories show that they were written with knowledge of it. Abram’s stay with the Philistines (*Gen* 20:1-18) is anachronistic. It could not have happened before about 1200 BC. The name of the Philistine ruler, Abimelech, is Semitic implying that the Philistines had been settled long enough to have assimilated with the local Semitic population. It implies a much later composition—in the fifth century BC not the eighteenth or earlier. Another notable anachronism is that Dan is mentioned supposedly 1000 years before it existed (*Gen* 14:14).

The story of the four eastern kings and the five cities of the Dead Sea (*Gen* 14) is mythical or thoroughly corrupted. Chedorlaomar is an acceptable name for an Elamite king (Kudur-lagomar), and Hurrian kings called Arriuka (Arioch) are known, and both could have been known by the Persians—the Elamites provided them with

scribes and the Assyrian archives would have given information about Hurrian kings. Similarly Tidal might be any one of three Hittite kings called Tudhaliya, but Goiim is not a country but simply means “gentiles” and Amraphel, king of Shinar, once thought to have been Hammurabi cannot be identified, and nor can Ellasar, though it was once thought to have been the Babylonian city of Larsa. No period in history can be found when any coalition of these named kings was possible. Inasmuch as anything can be had from it, the only time Elam would have undertaken a joint mission with other eastern kings was under the confederation led by the Chaldian kings of Urartu against Assyria. The cities are all destroyed by God and no traces of them have ever been found. The real reason is that they were not there in the first place!

The slime mentioned is oil or oily pitch. Bitumen can be found in the Dead Sea but oil can be more readily found in the oil bearing regions of Mesopotamia. Ignition of oil saturated land or waterways might also offer an explanation of the destroying conflagration. Shinab, the king of Admah, is cognate with Sinabu in Babylonian, meaning the god “Sin is father”. Admah is the same as Adam, meaning red and mud, appropriate descriptions of the country of Mesopotamia. Gomorrha might be a corruption of Cimmeria, briefly allies of the Chaldians of Urartu. The chances are that a fragment of a story of an uprising in Mesopotamia has been transferred to the valley of the Dead Sea in Palestine. Since the story is presented as a rebellion against the thirteen year rule of the king of Elam, the scholars should be looking to cities that were possibly under the suzerainty of Elam, about the time that Persia became strong. Elam, like many other places in the ancient near east, suffered a 400 year “Dark Age” so the scholars have an excuse not to succeed [Comment](#). But Elamites were certainly in the conquering armies of people like the Assyrians and the Persians.

The four kings are called kings of the east, but, in Judah, they would have been called kings of the north, the “eastern” invaders all coming from the north into Palestine. It is again a small clue that ties in with the association of Abraham with Syria. In Syria, there was an ancient city called Sidimu, and the eastern kings actually came from the east! Any alliance that could fit the situation was most likely an alliance of the Aramaean statelets against the conquering Assyrians. Josephus, in *Antiquities* (1:9 to 1:11), does not doubt that Sodom flourished when the Assyrians were dominant, and he readily has Abram fighting against them, thus repositioning him in history, compared with *Genesis*, from the second millennium to the first.

Sodom and Gomorrah in the mythological timescale of the Jewish scriptures were destroyed in the second millennium BC. R T Schaub and W Rast spent 15 years excavating about 30 ruins around the Dead Sea hoping to find Sodom and Gomorrah. Two towns to the south east of the Dead Sea had been spectacularly abandoned about 2350 BC. They were Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira, the latter of which was burnt up in a fierce conflagration in the season of the grape harvest for carbonized grape skins were found in the ashes. No human remains or small items were found, and the doorways at Numeira had been deliberately blocked with stones, so the people had had time to prepare for the disaster and to escape it with their belongings. Even so, they never returned. The ruined towns remained visible for centuries, looking as if they had been cursed by God. The biblical story could therefore have begun as an explanation of these ancient ruins that had passed into folklore.

But references particularly in the prophets (*Isa* 1:8-10; *Ezek* 16:46) give them a more contemporary sound, and it seems a more contemporary incident was set into the past using this old tale. Much of the bible has been written in this way, and the destruction of the cities of the plain meant in *Genesis* 14 and 19 might have really happened during the Assyrian period, or later still. In *Ezekiel* 16:46, Yehouah compares and contrasts Jerusalem with Samaria, a historical place, and with Sodom! Yehouah harangues Jerusalem for her harlotry

and wickedness:

And thine elder sister is Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at thy left hand, and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, is Sodom and her daughters.

*Ezekiel 16:46*

Jerusalem's *elder* sister, Samaria, lived to the north (to the left hand facing the rising sun), and her *younger* sister, Sodom, lived to the south. Samaria fell in the eighth century BC, but Sodom is supposed to have been destroyed by a catastrophe a millennium earlier. The biblical chronology has Sodom destroyed long before Samaria is founded! Moreover, here Sodom is younger than Jerusalem! Biblicists accept the biblical chronology that places Sodom in *Genesis* contemporary with Abraham, while this much more explicit passage putting Sodom contemporary with eighth century Jerusalem and Samaria is ignored. This Sodom is a city of a state neighbouring Jerusalem just as Samaria was.

*Genesis* seems to have omitted the true cause for Yehouah's vengeance in *Genesis* 19, and put in a differently angled account of it in *Genesis* 14. Yehouah typically in the bible punished the sin of His people through conquest, and the conflagration that followed. The sin of the Sodomites is far from clear, although Christians always know these things, so what could it realistically have been? It is that the Jews had broken a treaty that Yehouah must have been called upon to witness because it was the practice of the time to invoke the gods to witness solemn treaties. Assyrian royal inscriptions described the situation of *Genesis* 14. A city or small country is forced into vassalage to the Assyrians. The king pays a heavy tribute, but later, perhaps at the death of the Assyrian monarch, he forms an alliance with like-minded rulers of neighbouring statelets and the enemies of the Assyrians, and refuses tribute. The outcome is that the Assyrian monarch arranges a punitive expedition, sets out against the allies, and savages them, extracting the tribute by force and deporting the people.

Assyrian punitive expeditions had been commonplace in the final decades of the eighth century. Tiglath-pileser, Shalmanesar V, and Sargon had all come south with armies to punish "sin"—the breaking of these treaties. Bera was a king of Sodom (*Gen* 14:2), and, by coincidence, Beerah was a prince of the Reubenites carried off by Tiglath-pileser (*1 Chr* 5:6) for wickedness similar to that of the Sodomites. Tiglath-pileser deported the three tribes supposedly east of the Jordan river, the Reubenites, Gad and Manasseh. *Ezekiel* 16 recalls "the captivity of the daughters of Sodom", where "daughters" is used as part of an extended metaphor meaning the people of the city. They had been taken into captivity. Samaria had fallen, and the Transjordan too. Was this latter the place where the cities of the plain really were? It is at least a plain, which the coasts of the Dead Sea are not. A flaw in the idea that Sodom was destroyed by the Assyrians is that Assyrian sources do not refer to it, whereas they do mention Damascus, Hamath, Samaria, and Jerusalem. In reply, one can ask whether anyone had seriously looked, since the view that Sodom was destroyed a thousand years earlier is all pervasive. The Assyrians might also have had a different name for the city just as they had a different name for Israel (Bit Khumri), or the Jews might have given the city a false name out of the shame of it, as they did to shameful people. The colonists might have transferred the name of the northern town of Sidimu, already destroyed and legendary, to a southern one destroyed by the Assyrians in similar fashion.

At the end of the eighth century BC, Sennacherib sent a large army to punish the rebellious Aramaean kingdoms including Judah, eventually sieging Hezekiah in Jerusalem and extracting a large settlement by way of tribute, but first he destroyed 43 other cities in the region, often by fire, for sharing the sin—they had reneged on treaties

witnessed by the gods. Dependent kingdoms that refused to pay the agreed tribute—the sinners of the Assyrian kings—were destroyed commonly by fire. So, the details of the military defeat of Sodom in *Genesis* 14 may have been inspired by Sennacherib's Dead Sea campaign in 701 BC, confirmed archaeologically at Engedi, Qumran, and neighbouring sites. Father De Vaux found evidence that Qumran was an important place in the Assyrian period until about the seventh century BC, when it was utterly destroyed by fire.

Yehouah raining fire from heaven on the cities of the plain uses imagery popular with the Assyrian kings in their vassalage treaties. The gods of both sides are called upon to “let it rain burning coals in your land instead of dew”, if the vassal revoked the treaty unilaterally. Biblical disasters inflicted by foreign powers were typically punishments of Yehouah, for the biblical authors. Like the Romans at Carthage, Assyrian rulers razed rebellious cities, spread the site with salt and sulphur, and sowed their fields with thistles, leaving desolation. When, in *Genesis* 19, Yehouah rained fire and sulphur on the wicked cities and left them desolate, He had used the foreigner to serve up the punishment agreed by the parties to the vassalage treaties. The conquering Assyrians blamed the people's own god for such punishments, as did the Persians. Thus, Rab Shakah, at the walls of besieged Jerusalem, said Yehouah told Sennacherib to punish Judah—*Isaiah* agreed.

The names of the kings aligned against the cities of the plains might simply reflect the cosmopolitan nature of Assyrian armies. According to the author of *Isaiah* (*Isa* 22:6), Elamites fought for the Assyrians. Contingents from conquered nations like Shinar, and Elam were at the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701, and, *Ezra* says that Osnapper (Assurbanipal) later deported Elamites into Samaria. The four kings were perhaps generals of Sennacherib's foreign contingents.

The object of the story, for the authors, is to establish that the “returner”, Abram, was wealthy and would pay tithes of a tenth to Melchizedek, the priest-king of Jerusalem (Salem) even though Jerusalem was supposed at this time to have been a foreign city having no connexion with Yehouah! Melchizedek is usually read as meaning “My King is Righteous” but since Zedek is the name of the planet Jupiter in Hebrew, and Jupiter is the God of Heaven (Zeus to the Greeks and Dyaus Pitar to the early Aryans), the reading is equally “My king is the God of Heaven”, that is the Persian god, Ahuramazda. It also allows Yehouah to be granted the title El Elyon, illustrating the syncretistic nature of the bible and the syncretistic intent of the Persians in propagating it. El Elyon was the name used by the Phœnicians of their high gods. Phœnicians were also Hebrews—they too lived in Abarnahara! In an equal way, Yehouah is called, by Abraham, El Shaddai (“Almighty”), drawing in to His worship some other group of Hebrews, and in *Psalms* 91:1 El Elyon and El Shaddai are joined in poetic parallel to equate the two titles.

The first Hebrew in the biblical scheme pays tithes to the foreign king and in return gets a blessing and apparently a Eucharist! This was the view of the rabbis in the Targums:

Now Melkhizedek, king of Jerusalem, brought out bread and wine, for he was ministering [or, “for he was a priest ministering in the high priesthood”] before God Most High.

*Tg Onq*

Neither Abram nor his god, Yehouah, seem to mind this in the least even though Yehouah was to become noted as a jealous and petulant god. Christians would have burnt down this king's temple rather than share bread and wine sanctified by a Pagan god, and any blessing by such a god would have been considered a curse. There

has to be lessons here for somebody, but these people always know better than their supposedly holy books in the end! What is worth noting, though, is that a eucharist-like ritual was recorded in the most ancient of times, according to the bible itself. What then did Jesus institute at the Last Supper?

Both Abraham and Sarah speak directly to God, Sarah being the only woman to whom God deigns to speak. And the conversations are like those of the Greek Olympians. Abraham has to reason with Yehouah, and persuade him not to act hastily (*Gen 18:23f*)! Later, death is to be in “Abrahams’s bosom”, surely strong evidence that Abraham was regarded as God!

Deliberate mistranslations abound, as they do commonly in the scriptures, to show that God was monotheistic. The “plain(s) of Mamre” (*Gen 13:18; 18:1*) is the oaks of Mamre in the *Revised Version*, but they are Terebinth trees which were used by their distinctive shape and perhaps properties to mark sacred shrines. The shrine existed before Abraham got there because they were marked by these trees, and here then Abraham set up his altar to Yehouah. Either these sites were, or had been polytheistic sites available for people to worship the god of their choosing, or this signifies that Abraham rededicated a Pagan site to his own god. It is again a reflexion of the El-Yehouah conflict. The same is true of the planting of a “grove” in Beersheba (*Gen 21:33*). A grove was an Asherah, a standing stone or pole that was worshipped as a god!

The way the authors use words like Amorite, Hittite, Horite, and Canaanite, not in an ethnic way but to describe people regionally (*Gen 12:16; 15:20; 21; 23:3; 24:3*), is typical of the last millennium BC use when the original people had disappeared or been absorbed but regions remained with their tag. The Assyrians used these names to mean respectively Syrians, Phœnicians, Palestinians and dwellers on the east bank of the Jordan river. The use of the words Aramaean and Chaldaean similarly imply a late composition.

## **Nuzi Tablets**

Biblicists have surprisingly uncritical outlooks. They judge that the accounts of the travels of the Patriarchs sound authentic historically, and immediately conclude that therefore they are. Given *The Last Days of Pompeii* by Lord Litten, they would conclude that it sounds authentic and so was a contemporary work of Pliny the Elder. It is an example of the “congenial context” argument popular among believers. If a biblical account has some features that allow it to be fitted into a historical context, it is taken as evidence that the account is true. The argument might have some power when the criteria are sufficiently unique, but they never are. All you can say about the context of biblical stories is that they are BC. Only a few like the *Book of Daniel* give information allowing a precise date and that date is 400 years after the date supposed from its contents.

In 1977, Italian archaeologists, quite unexpectedly—showing that archaeology can still be exciting and that there is still plenty new to find—discovered a huge palace archive, one of the oldest state archives in the world, containing 15,000 inscribed clay tablets. They revealed an unknown but mighty Canaanite empire in Syria and Palestine around 2400 BC. Its capital was at Ebla, 30 miles from Aleppo, an enormous city for the time with a population of 250,000 people. The tablets mentioned Hazor, Gaza, Lachish, Megiddo, Akko, Sinai, Jerusalem (Urusalima), and Damascus thus proving that this ancient city was even older than anyone had suspected. By coincidence, a mosque in Damascus was being renovated at almost the same time and an arch found beneath the floor was dated to the third millennium, matching the Ebla date.



Biblicists got excited when they found names such as Ab-ra-mu (Abraham), E-sa-um (Esau), Ish-ma-ilu (Ishmael), even Is-ra-ilu (Israel), and Da-u-dum (David) and Sa-u-lum (Saul). A king of Ebla was called Ebrum, whom the excavator of Ebla, Giovanni Petinato, identified as the biblical Eber. He might as well have chosen to identify him with Abram himself.

Biblicists also find proof of the travels of Abram in the tablets found at Nuzi and Mari in Assyria, concluding again that the patriarchal accounts are second millennium BC. Mari or Tell Hariri, the ancient Near Eastern city-state, is on the Euphrates River between Harran and Ur. By the sixth century BC, Mari was only a small village, but beneath it, palaces had been built one on another for over a thousand years, from the Pre-Sargonic to the Old Babylonian periods. The palace compound covers over seven acres. Around 2250-2100 BC, temples were to Dagan and Ninharsug. Temples to Ishtar and a ziggurat have also been found.

Twenty thousand tablets and a some inscriptions have been unearthed. The language of the texts is Akkadian, and they are from the time of the last three kings of Mari, from 1800-1750 BC, ending when Hammurabi conquered the city in the thirty-fourth year of his reign. Only a quarter of the texts have been published. Scholars have hardly scratched the data yet.

Biblicists were seeing parallels in names between *Genesis* and names in the Mari tablets all over the place, but all are now rejected. They even claimed to have found a tribe of Benjamin. There *are* parallels between the tablets of Mari and the information in *Genesis* pertaining to Abraham, but mostly they reflect what was common to the way of life and the language of Semites in the Near East for millennia. Biblicists ignore entirely the fact that customs and habits changed only slowly until modern times. The same customs and habits have been found in records from the time of the new Assyrian empire, almost a thousand years later. They cannot be used to support the truth of the story of Abraham's wanderings, though dishonest evangelists still try, depending on their audience bowing to evangelical authority.

Biblicists point to the name "Ishmael", the same as that of a son of Abraham by his slave Hagar, in the Mari texts, but will not comment on the absence of Isaac. In any case, the use of a biblical name does not prove the historicity of the biblical story, only that such a name was used. The authors of *Genesis* would hardly have used names that were obviously anachronistic like Darius or Ptolemy. They were diplomats or senior officials and would have had access to the records of Assyria and Babylon, so could have written a convincing fiction. That the names, "Serug", "Nahor", "Terah", "Harran", and "Laban", for districts and towns near Harran occur at Mari simply shows that places had the same names for a long time.

A migration from Ur at the time of Abraham is feasible, but so it was both before and after, for millennia. The city Harran is found in the Mari archives of the eighteenth century BC, in the Cappadocian tablets of the twentieth and nineteenth centuries BC, and in the early Babylonian itineraries, but still had the same name into the Roman period. The word "harranu" means "highway", or "journey" in Akkadian, and the word "Padanu" also means "road" in Assyrian, showing that the city grew up and existed *because* it was on the caravan route. Harran and biblical Paddan Aram could have been the same place.

Mari texts confirm that trade occurred from Mari into Mesopotamia and to the Mediterranean, but who doubted it? Few people doubted that people could travel from Ur in old Sumer to Palestine. The question is whether the saga of Abraham is true history. Reiterating all the evidence from Mari that they traded with Ugarit, destroyed

in 1200 BC, but beforehand a well known trading centre for caravan and shipping merchants, and with Ur is empty. The Mari tablets show that trade routes spanned the route taken by Abraham but that proves nothing about the truth of the bible story. The time people *did* move from Syria to Palestine was under the Persians.

Nor is anything proved by showing parallels between words used at Mari and in the Hebrew of the Jewish scriptures. Both are Semitic languages. There are many, many such parallels. A phrase in the texts is “by the god of my father”, the faith and religion of the patriarchs. But it is a neutral phrase used because the society was polytheistic.

The temple at Harran was to the moon god, Sin, who was also worshipped at Ur. If Abraham came from those places at that time then it is odds on that he too worshipped Sin. The name “Laban” means “white” referring to the white moon, “Sarah-Sarai” is “Sarratu” in Akkadian and means “princess” referring to the goddess Ningal, wife of the moon god Sin. The word “Baal” was not used by the patriarchs, though it appears at Mari. We can take it that the “returners” did not worship Baal but came across him when they arrived in Canaan.

Evangelists like to use these parallels even though they know they are meaningless because their flocks are ignorant and easily persuaded by a smattering of historical knowledge whether it is valid or not.

Much is made of Sarai providing a slave girl for her husband. The childless wife Sarai (*Gen* 16:1-4; 30:1-8) invites her husband to copulate with a slave girl so that she can have children. In ancient Mesopotamia, priestesses were permitted to procure slave girls for their husbands because priestesses were obliged to remain virgins. *Genesis* does not suggest that these childless women are priestesses—they are childless because they are old and infertile. Once you accept that these women might have been priestesses, you have to consider that these are stories adapted from myths used in these ancient religions.

The Albrightians thought they had found the biblical practice in the tablets found at Nuzi from early in the second millennium. Nuzi for some time seems to have been the capital of Mitanni, a nation named after its ruling class but otherwise identified with the Huri, Hurrians or biblical Horites. Harran was part of this country for some time before it was replaced by the rise of the Hittites. The ruling Mitanni were Aryans, possibly the same people, at an earlier time, as the Medes. “Abraham” sounds curiously like the Aryan god “Brahman”, offering as a possibility that Abraham was an god or ancestor of the Hurrians remembered in Harran.

In the Nuzi tablets, the law specified that a marriage favoured with children prevented a husband from taking a second wife but, when the marriage was childless, the woman could procure a slave girl as her husband's concubine. The law seems to be to ensure that the husband has heirs not so that the wife can act as a mother to her slave's children. And the inheritance reverts back to any natural children born of the wife even if they are younger than the children to the concubine. But in *Genesis*, the children of the slave woman are still considered as heirs and Sarah fears that the “son of the slave woman” will be “heir with my son Isaac”.

Moreover, the biblical law did not only pertain to a childless wife because Nahor takes a concubine even though his wife had given him eight children (*Gen* 22:20-24). Jacob's wife Leah also presses him to take a concubine, though she too had children. The Nuzi tablets are records of marriage contracts so they are private agreements not civic law but none of them match the arrangements in *Genesis*.

The best that can be concluded is that they are of a type that was known at Nuzi, but also elsewhere in Mesopotamia and at a later date. Similar practices are attested in records from Nimrud in Assyria only a century before the “return from exile”. They suggest a Mesopotamian provenance for the practices and little more, but the strong links that the customs and language of the scriptures have with the Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians puts their composition in the mid-first millennium BC.

The stories of Abraham and Isaac passing off their wives as sisters (*Gen* 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 24:1-11) has been found in the Nuzi tablets, the Biblicists said. More careful or more honest scholars have found these identifications spurious. The claim was that the stories in *Genesis* were half remembered cases of a Nuzi practice of men adopting their wives as sisters to improve their security and status. None of the tablets had any case of a man adopting his wife as a sister while she remained his wife. A man adopted a woman as his sister it seems to formalize a divorce to allow her to marry another man, not himself.

The hint of the *Genesis* tales is perhaps at the Egyptian matrilineal inheritance of kingship being adopted by the Patriarchs in Egypt from their mentors. It was an incestuous practice that the new God of Heaven would not approve of and, in a later recension, it was disguised as a ploy rather than an Egyptian practice too disgraceful for a Patriarch.

Incidentally, the practice of Christian translators to disregard the words of their God as too crude shows that they have no religious scruples in the least about altering the inspired words of God when it suits their prudish mentality. The example here is at *Genesis* 24:2 when Abraham says to his servant get a hold of “my testicles” and swear by them. The root of the word “testicles” is the same as that of “testify” and “testament” precisely because this is the well known ancient way of making a pact. What do those lovers of the words of God write?

Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh.

Christians are not squeamish about their loving God when he is accepting young girls as a sacrifice or advocating murder, rapine and pillaging for His Chosen but for someone to hold another man’s testicles—that is too much for them to bear, so even God’s word has to be bowdlerized.

Biblicists have claimed that every element of the peculiar relationship of Laban and Jacob (*Gen* 29-31) was fully explained by a Nuzi tablet that was an adoption contract. The trouble is that the only part of the contract that was certainly matched in the *Genesis* account, that the adopted son should have no wives other than the ones agreed, was a universal specification over a long period in such contracts in the Near East. For the rest, Jacob had to work off the bride price of Laban’s two daughters—a total of fourteen years service—showing that he was not adopted by his uncle. Nor does Jacob ever regard Laban as his father—Isaac was his father and Laban his father-in-law and his employer. Jacob shows no desire to remain with his adoptive father as he should have—an adoption was intended to give security to both parties, the adopted in becoming the heir and the adopter in being provided for by his son.

Many of the supposed parallels of the Biblicists have only been achieved by a brazen bending of both the biblical and the external evidence to make them fit. J M Miller has compared it to the old tramp in *Mutt and Jeff* saying to his companion, “If we had some ham, we could have ham and eggs... If we had some eggs”. The plain truth is that the Biblicists have neither ham nor eggs but still claim that they are having ham and eggs.

Rachel's theft of the household gods looks close to a passage in a Nuzi contract that bequeaths the gods to a natural son, should one arise, rather than the adopted son. The implication of *Genesis* would have to be that Jacob had lost this part of his inheritance because Laban had had a natural son after adopting Jacob. Note the ham and eggs approach of making assumptions to produce the imaginary ham and eggs.

More reasonably, a god that has to be protected by an unclean woman sitting on it is not much of a god! The menstrual Rachel protecting the family gods made them look ridiculous compared with the God of Heaven, who was the one who did any sitting on people that had to be done. It can only have meant anything if the worshippers of family gods were being denigrated by the worshippers of the God of Heaven—when the Persian administrators set out to impose Ahuramazda on to the Canaanites.

Abraham's purchase of a grave site from Ephron the Hittite (*Gen 23*) supposedly reflects Hittite feudal law, but such laws are general to feudal societies and "Hittite", at the time of the Persian imposition, was synonymous with someone living in northern Canaan, whether Canaanite, Hittite or Aramaean. That will be what is meant because the incident closely resembles the "dialogue documents" of the New Babylonian and Persian periods that record negotiations of this type.

T L Thompson and J van Seters have shown that every instance used to justify the Patriarchal sagas from the Nuzi tablets is false. Each instance is explained better by Mesopotamian laws and customs of the first millennium BC not the earlier records, particularly the status of family law in these societies. From a meticulous examination of the biblical stories of Abraham and the other patriarchs, they had to conclude the stories were written in the fifth century during the Persian period. Oded Lipschitz of Tel Aviv University agrees that the circumstances described in the Abraham narrative applies to the Babylonian and Persian periods, the time of the return from captivity, when Judah was only Jerusalem and a small surrounding area. Many of the Persian colonists came from Urartu and northern Syria, into Yehud to set up the temple state, and they allegorized their migration in the patriarchal stories in which some of their own national heroes or gods represented themselves as people.

## Reformations?

In Abraham and Lot dividing the land, the division is between gods not between men. The valley as far as the wicked city of Sodom is Lot's domain while Abraham bases himself in the hills at Hebron. The "Father of the Heights" is in the heights and the rival god, Lot, is in the depths below. The implication is the contrast between a god of this world and a god of the nether world. The Babylonians had a god called Loz who was a co-ruler of the underworld with Nergal and his consort Ereshkigal, unless it was another name for Nergal, who was also called Lugalmeslam or king of Meslam. Meslam was the underworld, where the sun went at night. Furthermore, Lotan was another name for Leviathan, the monster of the deep, identifiable in *Psalms 74* with the Tehom (Tiamat) of *Genesis 1:2*. So, although Lot and Abraham are shown as having amicable relations together, we are seeing a diluted version of the struggle between the upper and the lower regions of creation. Naturally the men who chose to serve Lot in his city of Sodom were the wicked who would be destroyed at the Eschaton. And so they were.

Professor Sayce, the Assyriologist, tells us that the sentence about raining fire and brimstone in the tale of

Sodom and Gomorrha appears in an Akkadian hymn addressed probably to the air God, Rimmon.

In the Zoroastrian eschaton, the “divas”, the heathen gods, are destroyed with Angra Mainyu. Later, Angra Mainyu as Ahriman was shown as a lion-headed serpent. In Babylon, the Persians associated this concept of chaos with the native legend of Tiamat, the chaotic deep. In Judaism, the serpent is Leviathan (Rehob):

In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent,  
even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.

*Isaiah 27:1*

A steward of Abraham is mentioned (*Gen 15:2*) called Dammasek Eliezer, who was to be his heir since he had no children. Though the name is often translated “Eliezer of Damascus”, everyone knows it does not and cannot mean this. The steward had nothing to do with Damascus because he was born in Abraham’s family. The *Septuagint* and the Syriac are no help here because they also have no idea what the original meant. The straightforward explanation is that Abraham’s steward is not Dammasek but Hammilk, the “king” Eliezer!

Actual human kings were considered to have been appointed by the local god and so stood for him on earth. John Gray in *Near Eastern Mythology* says that in Canaan, the king is the Servant of El, just as King David was the Servant of God. The status of the king is that of the executive of the will of the divine king—the god. Abraham was the god and Eliezer was his steward, the king! In *Deuteronomy*, each nation has its god in El’s council in heaven and, in *Isaiah 24:21-23*, the “kings of the earth” were to be punished with the “host of heaven” “on that day”. The enemies of the Jews are “the kings”, and “kings and nations”. Hammilk was also a Phœnician god, so here again there are several layers of syncretism.

Abraham is the case of a popular god brought down to earth as a hero in the interests of syncretistic monotheism. Here he is made the heroic and perhaps eponymous founder of the Hebrew people. His original worshippers could retain their allegiance to the hero as the Pagans did to their Pagan gods made into Christian saints, and at the same time indirectly transfer their worship to Abraham’s own god, Yehouah.

In his commentary in *Peake*, Hooke thinks the covenant ritual of Abraham (*Gen 17*) survived until Jeremiah (*Jer 34:18*), apparently not even imagining that it had been retrojected into the modified mythology of the Abraham narratives. He notes a similar ritual between Ahur-nirari and the Syrian king, Mati-Ilu (which might be read as “My Land is God’s”) The cleverest biblical scholars are so blinkered by their acceptance of the biblical stories as unquestionably presented by God, even if he has not sought freshness but has reused ancient myths of Pagan gods, that they simply cannot see that the Jewish scriptures are simply an expansion on a fifth century treaty imposed on the Jews by the Persians.

The ritual is marked at this point by the institution of circumcision as a token of the covenant. This however is from the Priest’s Code and is part of the later redacting. The bible has other explanations (*Josh 5:2-9*, *Ex 4:24-26*). Uncritical readers of the bible must think that circumcision in the ANE was a peculiarity of the Hebrews, instructed by God to use this curious form of mutilation to distinguish themselves from others. It is yet another example of the ineptitude of the Holy Ghost.

Circumcision was a widespread ritual in many parts of the world but not among the northern tribes who

constituted the Indo-European race and the Mongols. The Egyptians and the Phœnicians, both superior civilisations to the Israelites, and respectively their southern and northern neighbours themselves used circumcision as a religious ritual and cultural mark.

The Persians did not circumcise at first, and nor did the Greeks, although Dom Gregory Dix in, *Jew and Greek*, says, without citing his sources, that, when they took to the Aramaic language, the Persians adopted circumcision, but the Babylonians did not. If this is so, it is about the time that Darius II set up the Jewish Temple state. Darius had moved the capital to Babylon by then, at least for part of the year.

Why then was circumcision the sign of the covenant? It might have been sanctioned by the Babylonian Persian kings to distinguish worshippers of lesser gods from themselves, who did not practice it and worshipped Ahuramazda, or it might have been reintroduced by the priesthood to satisfy ancient habits—it was so well established that it had to be justified within the refashioned religion of the Jews. The passage in *Exodus* suggests it was of Midianite origin, possibly an admission that it was indeed approved by the Persians as a distinguishing mark, if “Midianite” is a biblical code word for “Mede”.

It seems likely that the pre-eminent worshippers of Yehouah practised circumcision because it was the habit in Canaan, and the Persians were happy for it to continue as a token substitute for child immolation. The story of Isaac being spared by Abraham justified the abandonment of child sacrifice practised by the Canaanites until the Persian period. Outside of the Persian sphere of influence, the Phœnicians seemed to have continued it—in Carthage.

In the debate between Abraham and Yehouah which occurs in *Genesis* 18, Abraham is treated almost as an equal by Yehouah, and, indeed, Yehouah defers to the greater wisdom of Abraham! It suggests that Yehouah and El were perhaps the original gods in debate. Later, Yehouah was elevated into El's seat, leaving Yehouah debating with himself. The problem seems to have been resolved by making the original El here into Abraham. Abraham seems more sensible and Yehouah more impulsive, so Abraham seems to be the original El brought down to earth. El was the “father of the gods” suggesting Abraham's name.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is the eschaton writ small for the purpose of this cautionary myth. Proof is that Lot's daughters find that no men remained in the world except Lot himself. They had to couple incestuously with their father when he was drunk to regenerate humanity. Their offspring turn out as the ancestors of the Moabites and the Ammonites, only. The clumsy editor hopes that his readers are too stupid to notice. Most of them were! Lot had been saved by Abraham in *Genesis* 14 but contrived to return to Sodom and again be ruined suggesting once more that *Genesis* 14 was an insertion. Lot's wife is a standing stone, an Asherah, the wife of a god, again suggesting that Lot was a god himself originally, and this myth is an explanation of it meant to deride it in the eyes of its devotees.

There are three places in *Genesis* where a patriarch trades his wife to a foreign king as his sister—Abraham in Egypt (*Gen* 12:10-20), Abraham in Gerar (*Gen* 20:1-18) and Isaac in Gerar (*Gen* 26:1-14). In the last two of them the king, Abimelech, is the same king and the situation is the same place (Gerar) suggesting that the same story has been used for two patriarchs, implying compiling by editors from other sources. Abraham's journey to Egypt seems to have no more purpose than to allow the story to be told. It seems likely that the J editor intended to omit it in favour of using the plot for Isaac for whom he was short of material, Isaac being a fictional link



between Abraham and Jacob. The E-story of Abraham in Gerar might have been the original tale because it is complete but not embellished with the famines and resultant wealth of the J versions. Doubtless all were put into the recompilation of the bible by the Maccabees after the civil war. The editors might already have seen the work they were reassembling as so sacred that they felt unable to miss out any of the fragments they found, though they had no compunction about adding what they thought was missing.

That Abraham should discard his son, Ishmael, and his housemaid mother, when Sarah became unexpectedly pregnant was a disgraceful and dishonorable thing to do, and if it were to be believed it proves that God was intent on creating strife in the world, since he is supposed to be clairvoyant. Even if it was how things were done in those days, it does not tie in with the modern concepts of honour and duty that God should also have foreseen. Since the passage justifies Jewish and Christian contempt of the Arabs, it should be rejected by any honorable people. Religious people defend it nevertheless on many spurious grounds as they can invent, but mainly because they take this unsavoury story to be God's word! Thus, according to Hooke:

1. It has its place in the history of revelation.
2. Ishmael was not a child of promise.
3. He came from an act of impatience and unbelief.
4. The son of a bond woman could not inherit with the son of a free woman.
5. The Arab tent dwellers remain in the ambit of the divine purpose.

So, it's all right then!

Isaac is little more than a link between Abram and Jacob but, if these stories have been composed late, the suggestion of human sacrifice could imply that some of the rites of the original Israelite religion of Canaan involved offering human infants as sacrifice, but that the new Persian religion rejected it. The offering of Isaac shows that the Hebrews offered child sacrifices, as we know they did, once Hebrews are accepted as the people of Abarnahara.

Sacrifice of first born sons was common in ancient Palestine. It is verified by the clay jar containing childrens bones found at Gerar in the Shephalah. Mesha of Moab sacrificed his first born to the Moabite god, Chemosh (2 Kg 3:26-27), the Phœnicians did the same as the many urns of charred infant's bones testify, the Ammonites offered their sons to Moloch (Lev 18:21; 20:2) and the Hebrew kings, Saul (1 Sam 14:43-46), Hiel at Jericho (1 Kg 16:34), Ahaz (2 Kg 16:3) and Manasseh (2 Kg 21:6) also offered up their sons, all of them recorded in scripture apparently as warnings against the practice in the new religion.

Now, if God had signified his desire not to accept child sacrifices almost at the beginning of Jewish history, it seems strange that passages elsewhere in the scriptures show that the practice continued for over a millennium afterwards! It shows that this early passage was actually added after the practice really ceased in the Persian period. It seems likely that the Persians persuaded the people of Abarnahara, who already practised circumcision, that the ritual replaced child sacrifice. In other words, they reinterpreted the origins of circumcision to eliminate human sacrifice. The implication of the story is that the sacrifice was to take place on the temple mount but the priestly author has forgotten that Jerusalem was a city in the hands of foreigners that Abraham himself had to placate with tithes and that David took some trouble to defeat. It was not an open space.

The priestly genealogy of Ishmael has his descendants arranged into twelve tribes as the Israelites were. Solomon, we find, had twelve taxation districts (1 Kg 4:2-7,27; 5:13; 9:23). This administrative division seems to have been common in the ancient near east. The taxation system of the Egyptians under Amenhotep had twelve districts also, and it is sensible for rulers because it allows the taxation of an administrative region to be spread evenly over the year. Each of the twelve sub-divisions paying their quota of tax in different months so that none feels unduly burdened by a continuous taxation or a single payment due to all in a single month. The rulers had continuous income and the region overall paid each month, but each month it was a different “tribe” that paid so the burden occurred only annually for each.

Abraham's purchase of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite seems anachronistic if Abraham was living around 1800 BC. The Hittites had not long been in Anatolia and were far from being a world power at that time. That a Hittite appears in Palestine in the story puts its authorship much later than it purports to be.

The story of Isaac and Rebekah has stylistic similarities with the extended romance of Joseph, and, like the story of Joseph is probably a late link—here between Abraham and Jacob. It also has the message that the colonists would not marry with the native Canaanites, not on ethic grounds but on religious ones. Isaac is not mentioned at all in the rest of the bible except in *Amos*. To judge by the Ebla, Nuzi and Mari tablets Isaac is not a Syrian name like the others. It looks like a form of Isaiah, and so is a late addition.

Abraham's family is settled in Aram. Two wives of Isaac and Jacob are Aramaeans. These were myths brought with them by the people who were forcibly settled in Yehud by the Persians, and they show that the people came from Syria (Aram).

Abraham wants a wife for his son but does not want her to be a Canaanite. He sends a servant to the city of Nahor in what he calls “my country”. In the bible, the Aramaeans (Syrians) are considered the kin of the Israelites, Aram being the grandson of Nahor, Abraham's Brother. Nahor means the river Euphrates. Nahor remained at home in Harran, so the servant has to return to Syria for a wife for Isaac. Note that Abram and Nahor, his surviving brother constitute the name Abernahara! The country translated as “Mesopotamia” (*Gen* 24:10) is Aram-naharaim, a name that parallels the name of the Persian satrapy of Abarnahara. “Naharaim” is a plural and so the scholars translate it as “two rivers” meaning Mesopotamia. The unbiased translation is “Aram of the rivers” and therefore means precisely that part of Syria (Aram) where there are rivers, the region of Harran and Urfa where the main river Euphrates is fed by several tributaries like the Khabur. This is exactly where the Aramaeans lived, not in Mesopotamia which the scholars say was occupied by Chaldaeans, though here they want readers to forget it.

Abram's dead brother, Harran stands for the city that was their home in Syria. Nahor has a son, Bethuel, and grandchildren, Laban and Rebekah. The scriptures state explicitly that they lived in Harran (*Gen* 11:31; 27:43; 28:4,10; 29:4), also called Paddan Aram. Nahor's children are places in Syria (*Gen* 22:20-24). Jacob has to retreat from Esau to Paddan Aram before returning stronger and wealthier. This suggests that an original intent to set up the temple state failed from local opposition and the colonists had to be re-equipped and reinforced. Even so, Jacob is full of trepidation, still unsure of the outcome, but the Edomites are mollified in advance by propitiatory gifts.

Jacob dreams of a ladder to heaven with angels ascending and descending. The ladder describes a ziggurat

with the worshippers and ministering priests marching up and down its steps. Jacob had the dream resting his head on a stone and, having awoken, he sets the stone up as a pillar, pouring a libation of oil on it, and renaming the place as Bethel from its original name Luz. Luz might well be Loz or Lot, a Babylonian god, and the story is of its rededication to El. Jacob was obviously a giant of a man to have such a huge stone as a pillow—an Asherah or phallic stone—suggesting again that here is a story of a god brought down to earth.

Note that while God destroyed the wicked cities, Lot and his daughters sought safety in a city of refuge called Zoar—or more properly Zara, since Josephus called it Zoara and the modern name is el-Zara. The implication is that Zarathustrianism, the religion of the Persians, was a refuge for the righteous Canaanites escaping the depraved ways of the old Canaanite religions. It also suggests that Zoar was an early shrine to the new Persian version of the Canaanite god. It was denoted as a significant place in the early period of the “return” to Canaan because it was one of the landmarks noticed by Moses from Pisgah.

*Genesis* 36 gives a history of the Edomites, supposedly descendants of Esau, although Esau has no etymological connexion with Edom. It is probably not a Semitic word but Indo-European. The Edomites had a monarchy long before the people of the Palestinian hills, according to this account. Eight Edomite kings preceded the formation of an Israelite monarchy. In fact, the Edomites had to be displaced to make room for the temple state of Yehud, creating an antipathy against Israel that remains until today. This story recognizes that Edom existed first and Jacob taking Esau’s blessing and birthright, is an acknowledgement of it.

The conflict is also acknowledged elsewhere. In a passage added to the original folklore tales of *Judges* by some later priest copying *Numbers* 20:14-21, Edom refuses to allow the Israelites to pass to get to Canaan (*Jg* 11:17), and *Amos* 1:11-12 refers to it. All of this is quite contrary to the command of *Deuteronomy* 23:7, where the problem created by the creation of the temple state makes the lawmaker order that “thou shalt not abhor an Edomite for he is thy brother”. Hooke comments that this could not have been written after the exile when feeling was so bitter, but that is exactly why it was written. If Esau is Edom in the Jacob cycle then the story ends with the brothers reconciled. The Persians did not want their vassals fighting each other.

The Biblicists must think that God deliberately wrote the Jewish scriptures to look as if it were a vassalage treaty by the Persian overlords of the conquered peoples simply to test the faith of the believer. They consider it their duty to help to prove that despite its form, it is really true revelation and not a bondage contract. They hide the discrepancies between truth and the bible until they become liars without apparently noticing—such is the power of faith and a sinecure.

## **The Price of a Dog?**

The law of the Jews was not favorably disposed to sexual activity between males, if *Leviticus* 18:22; 20:13 are to be believed. The warnings against the Sodomites seem to be a warning against the practices of the native Canaanite religions, which evidently included sacred prostitution. Similar warnings were placed in Joshiah, Hilkiah and Shashan (*Dt* 22-23). In *Deuteronomy* 23:18 the female prostitute and the “dog” are linked as if to female and male prostitutes:

There shall be no sanctuary woman (“qedeshah”) from the daughters of Israel,  
and there shall be no sanctuary man (“qadesh”) from the sons of Israel.

You shall not bring the cost of a prostitute (“zownah”) or the price of a dog (“keleb”) into the house of Yehouah your god, for any vow, for surely both of them are an abomination to Yehouah your god.

Dt 23:17-18

It seems clear from the parallelism in these verses that “keleb” cannot have originally simply meant a dog, as it later did to avoid the shame. It is unreasonable to argue that ancient Israelite men alone were too godfearing to have been homosexual prostitutes, and stuck to marriage, procreation, and dominating their wives and families.

Female prostitution is mentioned often in the Jewish scriptures, but not the “dogs”. The “hire of a harlot and the price of a dog” were references to sacred prostitution of women or men. A “dog” meant a dog priest and today “dog” is used of a *woman* available for sex. “Dog-priests” would dress as women and allow themselves to be used in sacred sexual acts, the reason why Jewish priests could not wear women’s clothes. They used their “tails”, in the same way, and could not belong to Yehouah’s chosen people or bring offerings into Yehouah’s holy presence.

The *New Jerusalem Bible*, which literally translates “dog”, adds the footnote, “a contemptuous term for male prostitute”. This verse is its only occurrence in the Jewish scriptures. Though the later editors of the Jewish scriptures tried to ignore their existence, Israel had had the same practice as “the nations” in this before the Persian law. 2 *Kings* 23:7 implies that special quarters were available in the temple for “dog priests” before the reforms of the “returners”. The taboo on dogs in the temple will be a reflexion of this older practice.

John Barclay Burns of George Mason University on the web has reviewed the significance of dog (“keleb”) as a symbol of male passivity and perversion. The “dog” *did* signify a male homosexual prostitute, and shows that homosexual temple prostitution must have been happening before the law was introduced. Mesopotamian texts speak of male cult figures whose sexuality was equivocal who engaged in sex-related practices. One text refers literally to the “woman-like” who agreed to divide his earnings with the tavern-keeper presumably for being allowed to ply his trade. Taverns were permitted places of resort for prostitutes of both sexes.

The “assinnu” was a homosexual member of Ishtar’s cultic staff with whom a man had intercourse. A “zikaru” was a “real” man, a “kuluyu” was an effeminate man, and the “kurgarrusang”, was a transvestite who acted and danced in the worship of Inanna-Ishtar. The “kuluyu” was certainly a male prostitute in the saying, “the word of the male or female prostitute of the city”. The “assinnu” lacked libido, either from a natural defect or castration, and the word was written in the cuneiform signs as “dog-woman”. However, the cognate Akkadian word for dog, “kalbu”, seems not to have been used in this way.

Fifth-century BC tariffs from the temple of Astarte in Kition, Cyprus, include the “klbm”, “dogs”, who were paid for their participation in the feast of the new moon, but the texts do not say what they are paid for. This is in contrast to *Deuteronomy* 23:18 where the “keleb” is forbidden to bring payment into the house of Yehouah. J C L Gibson thought the word was an alternative for “qdsh”, which he equated with the Hebrew “qadesh”, literally, “holy man”, thus a sacred male prostitute.

D W Thomas noting the parallelism, took “qadesh”, “a sacred male prostitute”, in verse 17 as the controlling

word, and understood “dog” in terms of a male adherent or the devoted follower of a deity. The Amarna letters, he argued, used “kalbu”, “dog”, as a term signifying abject devotion. Abdi-Ashratu, a Canaanite kinglet, assured the Egyptian pharaoh that he was the “dog” of his house, to be construed as a loyal and devoted vassal:

The whole of Amurru land, I watch for the king my lord.

Further, a suppliant to Marduk depicted himself thus:

Like a little dog, O Marduk, I run behind thee.

Thomas also noted that the Phœnician word “klbylm”, “dog of the gods”, was parallel to “abdyln”, “servant of the gods”. He concluded that it had nothing to do with the sexual habits of dogs and had no sense of dishonour. It was a faithful follower, probably of the goddess Asherah. The authors of *Deuteronomy* seemed not to agree, but G von Rad and A D H Mayes did, and took both verses to mean cultic prostitution carried out by devotees but having no pejorative connotation.

O Margalith speculated that the prostitutes and the “dogs” drinking the blood of Ahab ( *1 Kg* 22:38) meant the cult of Cybele-Dionysos, with its frenzied female and castrated male votaries, had been introduced to Israel by Jezebel and opposed by Elijah. *1 Kings* 21:19 was a warning to Ahab that if he tolerated the introduction of this cult he would be its next victim, his bloody corpse devoured by the said votaries.

A collection of cuneiform tablets known as the Middle Assyrian Laws was probably made towards the end of the reign of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BC). In them passivity in a freeborn male either forced, connived at, or consented to, disgraced the passive one by categorizing him with females and slaves, while penetration demonstrated masculinity and mastery.

Laws 19-20 mention only men. If a man slanders his comrade, either out of malice or as the result of a quarrel, “everyone has sex with him”. That passive homosexual intercourse is meant here is clear from the fact that the same word is used in law 18, “everyone has sex with your wife”. The root is “naku”, used of initiating illicit sexual intercourse and so literally “fuck”. The punishment is for unproved slander, not for promiscuity, heterosexual or homosexual, and no moral or legal judgment is made on the passive partner. The juxtaposition of laws 18 and 19 shows that passivity equals femininity.

Law 20 considers homosexual acts between male equals: “If a man has sex with his comrade...” and this is proven, then his accusers “shall have sex with him and turn him into a eunuch”. Only the active partner is punished here. “Naku” has no connotation of rape, so the law does not imply violence, but it does mean initiating illicit intercourse. One of the men was seen as the seducer, and seduction of a male equal into passive intercourse was the crime. A punishment for the passive partner is not mentioned. In *Leviticus* 20:13 both men are sentenced to death.

To adopt the role of the powerless was to share their state. The male who submitted to penetration was no better than a woman. *Leviticus* 18:22 should be understood in this context: the free Israelite adult male who permitted penetration and the one who took advantage of this reprehensible passivity were equally guilty. It was an “abomination”.

The use of the term “dog” to signify not only fidelity but also lowly, and groveling self-abasement, and to insult one’s enemies is well-known in the letters from El-Amarna and Lachish. In the Amarna letters, the great kings of Hatti, Assyria, Babylon, and Mitanni wrote as brothers. For the Canaanite vassals, the situation was different. The designation “dog” is used by the petty kinglets of Canaan to their Egyptian overlord, Amunhotep III (c 1388—1350 BC) or Akhenaten (c 1350—1338 BC). They used a standard prostration formula, “I fall at the feet of the king, my lord, 7 and 7 times”, to which was sometimes appended, “both on the stomach and on the back”.

The designation “dog” is employed as a term of insult when one king protests to the pharaoh about the actions of another: the king of Byblos, Rib-Hadda, levels a charge against the king of Amurru, Abdi-Ashirta, “what is A[bdi]-Ash[ir]ta, the dog, that he strives to take all the cities of the king”. Rib-Hadda used the term usually to slander his enemies who include his brother. On one occasion he is driven to the epithet “evil dog”. Abdi-Ashirta depicts himself positively as a watch dog who guards Amurru for the king. In the letters from Lachish (589 BC), the designation “dog” is used by an inferior greeting a superior officer, “what is your servant (but) a dog, that my lord should remember his servant.

That there was an actual image behind this canine metaphor can be seen from one particular position often assumed by the inferior before the superior—two of the tribute-bearing Syrians before the pharaoh Tutmosis III, two servants at the adoration of Ay from El-Amarna, and, Jehu of Israel submitting to the Assyrian king Shalmanezzer III. The supplicant kneels with his head between his hands with raised rump. The images of the “dog” as a faithful or groveling servant or as a homosexual prostitute submitting his rear for penetration were not easily distinguished.

## Joseph

Professor J A Soggin has closely examined the date of the story of Joseph, and finds it is impossible to give it a contemporary date in the second millennium, when believers think it all happened. The story of

Joseph is a late romance. As Soggin says, “Too many elements point to a late date of composition”. There are few signs of the cut and paste assembly that characterize much of the bible. It seems a complete tale. It has none of the signs typical of oral transmission that usually characterize sagas and noted by Gunkel in his examination of *Genesis*. It is carefully planned and executed as a literary work—a novella. It hinges on interpretation of dreams, putting it in the same category as *Daniel 2; 4*, which was not written until 165 BC. The plot is closely linked with the plots of other late biblical romances like *Esther*, *Tobit*, *Judith* and also the popular romance *Ahiqar*. F W Golka, in *The Leopard’s Spots*, confirms that the story of Joseph has all the signs of a composition rather than a compilation.

There are plenty of signs that the *Pentateuch* was written only after the Persians had conquered the region and had had time to make innovations previously unknown. Donald B Redford in 1970 dated it in the fifth century—in the Persian period. Some of the words used suggest the composition was influenced by Babylon, and



Jehu submits



therefore pertain to after the “return”. Pithom and Pi-Rameses are called in *Exodus* “store cities” but the word used is an unusual Akkadian word in the bible, a strange choice of word for an author who was an Egyptian. The expression used by the Egyptians to salute Joseph’s carriage as it passed by, “abrek” (*Gen* 41:43), looks to be the Akkadian word, “abarakku”, which appears in Phoenician as “hbrk” and means a high official like a vizier.

Inadvertant clues, like this, show that the underlying story, if not the more obvious elaboration of it, was not Egyptian but Mesopotamian. It is odd that Mesopotamian words should creep into this story unless the authors were preferring some words with which they were familiar. In other words, the authors were from Mesopotamia, and since Akkadian was, like Latin, a dead language used in religious contexts only, the implication of its use is that the writers were priests.

*Genesis* 40:22 says the chief baker was “hanged” proving that the story was written after hanging (crucifixion) had been adopted. The Egyptians did not use this form of murder until the Persian period. So, the story is post-Persian. Almonds were also introduced by the Persians from Asia, so that several passages suggest a late date for the *Pentateuch* (*Gen* 48:11, four instances in *Exodus*, *Num* 17:8). Money is also mentioned (*Gen* 47:14,16) at a time long before its use was spread by the Persians who took the idea from Lydia.

D B Redford had noted that the Joseph story is not sound in its information about Egyptian matters, but rather reflects the customs of Canaanite royal households rather than those of the Egyptian Pharaohs. The eastern wind of *Genesis* 41:5 is the *sharab*, that blows into Palestine from the Arabian desert. It does not blow into Egypt. Joseph’s Egyptian name is a fake or a poor attempt at transliterating a genuine Egyptian name into Hebrew. Since Redford few people have tried to date it even so early. The place of Israelite slavery, Gothen, is unknown in any ancient Egyptian texts until the Hellenistic period when it was one of the *nomes*. Similarly *Genesis* 41:45 mentions On, the Heliopolis of Hellenistic times.

Biblicists counter this by what they call the “local colour”, but they are using the usual Christian “arguments” of plausibility and congenial context when such stories in such terms could be dated at any time BC. The local colour is pretty wishy washy. Biblicists say the emblaming of Joseph reflects Egyptian mummification, the local colour, but the practice of embalming in Egypt was better known in the later, more worldly, period of the Greeks and Romans than it was before. So, in the late period, it was a known Egyptian practice, but it was also a late Jewish practice, so need not have reflected Egypt at all. Joseph gave instruction he had to be returned home, and embalming was also a specific practice for treating bodies that had to be transported, since carrying a body putrifying in the heat could not have been pleasant. Sunday school teachers and Christian fundamentalists do not want to give alternatives to their preferred explanations. Theirs is the sin of omission! Take note! An omniscient God must notice it, even if they do not.

One clue to the date is that there is mistrust against Joseph’s brothers, who are carefully quizzed and obliged to admit their other brother, Benjamin, and their father. They are treated the way Moslems are currently being treated by the west. Plainly there must have been a division present in the near east of the time that left the Egyptians feeling distrusting. Moreover, the distrust of the Israelites by the Pharaoh of the Exodus, reflects the same distrust. The Egyptians thought the Israelites might be a fifth column in their own land. For most of the times accepted for these biblical events, Egypt actually controlled Canaan as a colony, and it seems unlikely that Israelites could have been thought of as likely enemies or allies of some serious enemy. The Egyptians

were the allies of the small hill states against Assyria, so the Assyrian period does not fit either.

There are only one serious occasion this distrust could have reflected. It must have been long after Canaan had been an Egyptian colony, and reliable buffer of Egypt. Palestine must have been under the control of an enemy of Egypt for long enough for the Egyptians to have doubts about Canaanite fidelity. The only such enemy was the Persians from the fifth century BC. The Ptolemies took over from the Persians to reassert Egyptian hegemony over Palestine, but the Persians had spent over a century preparing the Jewish temple state as a buttress against Egypt, and had given them laws and holy myths, that they had become attached to. The Ptolemies ran Egypt, and supported the publication of the Jewish scriptures in the third century on behalf of the Jewish priesthood whom they made a strong effort to win back to favour the Egyptians as saviours and protectors.

The biblical suggestion that the Egyptians would not share a table with Israelites is unknown anywhere else. It sounds like a misrecording of the reverse situation. That after the Persian period, the Jews would not share a table with foreigners. It would sound churlish that the Canaanite brothers of Joseph would not share a table with their benefactors, and so the storyline has been reversed, with the intention of making out that the Jews had their habit from the Egyptians not the Persians. And, the Egyptian priests, like the Magi, had the same habit, doubtless under their influence from the time of Cambyses. The Jewish state was set up by the Persians as a temple state and the people were to be *anation of priests*. All of them had to adopt the strict purity codes of the Magi.

In the terms of Ezra, the sons of Joseph were not admissible as Jews, because their mother was Egyptian and worshipped Egyptian gods, yet here they went on to become two large northern tribes—Ephraim and Manasseh. The story is written after the time of Ezra, in reality, so it might seem odd that these two tribes were ever thought of. The point is that the Egyptians of the Ptolemies were trying to re-align Jewish loyalty from the Persians to the Egyptians, and so were trying to impress Egyptian-ness on to the formerly Persian culture of the Jews. In the later romance of Joseph and Aseneth, Aseneth is converted to Judaism. The myth of Exodus from Egypt had the same purpose. Jews were to think of themselves as Egyptian, not Persian. The story itself presents Egypt as a saviour of the Jews under direct command of God. It was God's will that the Jews should feel indebted to Egypt (*Gen 45:8*).

Joseph is peculiarly wise and interprets the Pharaoh's dreams as plenty and plague, advising him to stock up in times of plenty and dole out in times of famine. The seven year cycles of plenty and famine are fable but the advice is like telling granny how to suck eggs. The Pharaoh and the Egyptian priesthood owned the land and always had control of what happened to the produce from it. That they had not thought of storing up for times of need is absurd. It is like the myth of the great prehistoric Welsh navigator, Llew, arriving at Jericho and finding there the newly arrived Israelite tribes speaking Welsh and eating pigs. "Fellow Welshmen", he declared, "Never eat pig, for it is the sacred animal of winter". Whereupon he told them the whole cycle of Camelot myths that eventually metamorphosed into the Jewish scriptures. The Israelites were so amazed, they never ate pig again, but forgot why, except for Welsh Jews who are well known to enjoy fried bacon with laver bread for breakfast. The story of Joseph is of precisely the same kind.

The Joseph romance, originally based on some elements of the Jacob cycle, will not have reached its present form until the time of the Maccabees about 150 BC. The name Jacob occurs often in the story and the doublet

about the brothers getting rid of Joseph suggests a basis in an earlier tale expanded at the time of the Ptolemies, when they sponsored the Jerusalem temple to show the friendship of Egypt for Judah. The myth of Joseph is an Egyptian folk tale (or tales) used as a narrative bridge between the cycle of stories about the patriarchs and the cycle of stories about Moses. The story of Potiphar's wife is known in an old Egyptian story called *The Two Brothers*.

The origins of the Joseph story in the bible are much simpler than the extended romance we now have.

A wandering Aramaean was my father, and he went down into Egypt and he sojourned there few in number.

*Dt 26:5*

Jacob and his children went down into Egypt.

*Josh 24:4*

There is no mention of Joseph. The extended Joseph romance was probably added to enlarge upon and essentially replace the original terse tradition of wandering Aramaeans when the saga of Moses was devised. The Persians will have presented the Jews as slaves of Egypt, not because they were ever in Egypt but because they were ruled by the Pharaohs. The Persians wanted to show that the Jews had good reason to be opposed to their former Lords and Masters, the Egyptians. From 300 BC, however, Yehud was ruled by the Egyptians and the temple was favoured by the Ptolemies in about mid-century and many expensive gifts were given to the temple. This also was when the Torah was said to have been translated into Greek, the language of the Egyptian kings.

This then will have been the time when the story of Joseph was added, flattering the Egyptian king as a liberal willing to accept foreigners as his ministers and, particularly, appointing a Jew to the highest position in the land, all at the command of the Jewish God.

## Conclusions

In summary, it is true to say that not one of the events or characters of the early scriptural books have been confirmed by documental, inscriptional or archaeological evidence. The literary genre of the stories and this absence of objective evidence cry out that these are myths of national identity, and the most likely time of their composition is after the Babylonian "exile". Try to get a Christian to believe evidence, though! They persist that God is making a revelation even though he contrives to make it look like a forgery. What is God's purpose in doing that?

The truth is that they put their faith in the scriptures not in God, and so they will defend the scriptures even though they can no longer *be* defended on the evidence. If they once accepted that the ancient set of tall tales, myth and romance was Persian propaganda, their faith in God would evaporate. That, of course, shows that they have little faith in God but it is a proper reaction. After all the God was set up for a human purpose, so why shouldn't this be recognized again?

As to the differences in the practices of the patriarchs with the later religion—again used as an argument for

ancient provenance rather than myth-making—there are two reasons. One is that the proto-scriptures were not all written at once, they were composed over a period of about 100 years and might have covered several phases of “returners”. In that time, changes were made that have left their fossils in the mythology.

The other reason was that the aim of the Persian governors was to depict the Jews mainly faithless, to persuade them to make amends for the supposed failings of their forefathers. So the old religious practices of the native Canaanites, the Am ha-Eretz, were depicted as apostasy from the worship of the true god, but when later “returners” implemented the priestly law and bound worship of Yehouah to the temple, the tales of earlier “returners” served to add to the myth by showing even God’s servants as disloyal. The practice of marrying a sister hinted at in the stories of Abraham and Jacob but later banned serves to show even these Patriarchs of dubious dedication to the true god.

Hooke points out that people do not invent myths of their own humiliation, though that is the constant theme of the Jewish scriptures beginning with *Genesis*. It should be sufficient to show that Jews did not write these scriptures. It was their rulers—the Persians.

A steady theme of these sagas is that the younger brother is preferred to the elder and rightful heir. It symbolizes and justifies the intrusion of the new state of Yehud and its new god.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?**  
**Moses And the Exodus (Part I)**

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## **Moses and Exodus**

The exodus events are vitally important to Jews and Christians, the latter because their god was crucified on the annual celebration of the Jewish exodus. Research into it has therefore been “constant and zealous”, in the words of professor J Alberto Soggin.

In the book of *Exodus*, the presence of the Israelites in Egypt is regarded as a given, and the only questions are whether, how and when God will remove them from the house of bondage. The story of the exodus begins only at the point when the Israelites groan under their hard labour. Then the Lord remembers (*Ex* 2:23-24) his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the narrative of *Genesis* 12-36. No one in *Exodus*, seems to remember the events of *Genesis* 37-50, chapters that have told us how the Israelites happen to be in Egypt in the first place, and no one seems to remember Joseph’s words to his brothers:

So it was not you who sent me here, but God.

*Genesis* 45:8

Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good.

*Genesis* 50:20

It is evidently not only the new Egyptian king who knows not Joseph (*Ex* 1:8), but the narrator also, and his character, God, seems to regard the presence of the Israelites in Egypt as nothing more than an unfortunate accident that has happened to them. He never acknowledges that it is his own deliberate design.

Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson, in *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, say the cultural and ethnic origin of the Israelites are difficult because the archaeological and biblical evidence have not been reconciled. The accounts “in the books of *Numbers*, *Joshua* and *Judges*, are often at odds both with other ancient textual sources and with the archaeological evidence for the settlement of Canaan in the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age (c 1600-750 BC)”. The story of the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt and the Exodus to Canaan described in *Genesis* and *Exodus* of the Jewish scriptures have no relationship with any known history. Biblical “scholars” cannot bring themselves to accept this simple fact. Uneducated slaves, desperately escaping from the armies of their powerful oppressor, forced into a primitive nomadic existence in the desert, do not sit down each night and write out a diary of the day’s events. Nomads keep up their spirits by telling tall stories around their campfires.

The migration of the Israelites is presented, like that of Abraham, as a one off passage, not anything to do with nomads. Nomads rarely choose to settle, valuing their *fresco* lifestyle. They usually have to be forced to settle. Even settled people do not keep official records until they form themselves into a nation. Whatever preceded the formation of the statelets around Jerusalem and Shechem was not recorded as history, so what is recorded

must be tall stories—mythology if you like. Will biblical “scholars” stop the pretence it is history? Not while their comfortable incomes depend on it!

If the Israelites were first slaves then nomads, how did they get such diverse skills? They can be allowed bricklaying no doubt, though bricklaying is a worthless skill in the desert, but how did they come to be wealthy stockbreeders, and even successful fishermen and gardeners (*Ex* 10:24;12:38; *Num* 11:5,22; 20:4) if they were enslaved? Before long, in the wilderness, they were also skilled carpenters, decorators and goldsmiths.

Moses, as the author of his *Exodus*, used the names cities had at a much later date, like Luz (Bethel) and Cariath Arbe (Hebron). He used the names of people who had not yet arrived in their lands in his day, such as the Chaldeans or the Philistines. The Law of Moses records a census and temple tax implying the use of coins, which first came into use (so far as is known) in the kingdom of Lydia in the seventh century BC, 700 years later. *Genesis* 36:31 presupposes a kingdom in Israel, 500 years before it existed. The *Ten Commandments* also presuppose that the Israelites are already in the Promised Land, even though they were handed out in Sinai. Doubtless believers will attribute these to God’s prescience, but those who are less gullible will put it down to bad editing.

K Koch as long ago as 1962 declared that he could see nothing historical in the biography of Moses, and J Alberto Soggin ( *An Introduction to the History of Israel and Judah* ) is blunt about these biblical accounts:

The biblical sources are rich in anecdotes, popular tradition and elements of folklore... [but] they lack information which is capable of verification by historical investigation: the Pharaohs or other important officials are never named, and the chronological information is imprecise. To this must be added the almost complete silence of the Egyptian sources.

Egyptian papyri from the end of the thirteenth century BC have been found that detail the least things about Egyptian life and events of the time. One note explains that two(!) escaping slaves were diligently pursued across the border, yet there is no record of two million Israelite slaves leaving all at once one night. Many many Egyptian inscriptions on temples and papyri have been read but not one mentions *any* Israelites that were slaves or even legitimate settlers in Egypt. Jewish and Christian scholars have no choice but to recognize the truth of this—it *is* true—but they pretend it does not matter because the biblical story *could be* true, even so! Could it?

## **Biblical Chronology**

Seventy people went down to Egypt at the time of Joseph (*Gen* 46:27). After three generations, two million emerged (*Ex* 12:37). The sons of Machir, Joseph’s grandson, were born while Joseph was still alive, yet took part in the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan and even the settlement in the Promised Land (*Gen* 50:23; *Num* 32:39-40; *Josh* 13:31;17:1; *Ex* 6:16-20). For this to be true and the period of the wandering in the wilderness to be 40 years, the period of enslavement in Egypt could hardly have been more than another 40 years. In this short time, the Israelites had multiplied until the land of Egypt was “filled with them” (*Ex* 1:7). Each of the Israelite men would have had to have had a harem of wives for this to have been true. No slave could provide for a dozen wives and about 40 children.



The time spent in slavery is not clear:

- ❑ *Genesis* 15:13 says 400 years.
- ❑ *Genesis* 15:16 says four generations, normally forty years each but here evidently 100 years each.
- ❑ *Exodus* 12:40-41 says 430 years.
- ❑ The Jewish historian Josephus says it was 215 years.

The date of the Exodus is given in *1 Kings* 6:1 as 480 years before Solomon began to build his temple. Solomon, the biblicalists tell us, began his reign about 960 BC, so the Exodus occurred about 1440 BC. Josephus placed the Exodus in the fifteenth century with the expulsion of the Hyksos, the mysterious Asiatic kings of Egypt. A few years ago, some scholars again favoured such an early date after many years when the thirteenth century was favoured. Garstang dated the fall of the walls of Jericho in 1400 BC, fitting a fifteenth century Exodus, if the Israelites were assumed to have caused that particular destruction of Jericho. Since the Amarna letters spoke of attacks by “Apiru”, a word that reminded some philologists of the word “Hebrew”, the biblicalists were overjoyed. Egyptian texts from the next century spoke of “Asaru”, more joy for biblicalists, who declared them to be the tribe of Asher!

The Jewish scriptures are, however, built around an idealized chronology. 480 years is twelve Jewish generations of 40 years, each the length of the reigns of both king David and king Solomon. The date when the temple was started is given in *Kings* relative to the “return” from “exile”. It is precisely 480 years earlier. If all this does not signal that the whole tale is made up, it is hard to know what would.

The authors of the mythical Jewish history wanted to put the construction of the first temple at the centre of Jewish history because they were claiming that by restoring the temple and setting up its laws and priesthood, they were re-establishing God’s will! The scriptures were written by people with a vested interest in the authority of the temple, the Jewish priesthood sent from Persia by the Persian kings to establish a loyal buffer state between Persia and Egypt. The Persians under Cambyses had conquered Egypt but it was too large a victim to be easily swallowed, and the Egyptians rebelled constantly against their Persian masters.

The story of Moses and the Exodus was intended to paint Egypt as the natural enemy of the Jews. The Egyptians would as soon enslave them again. Believing this, the Jews would remain loyal to their kind benefactors and deliverers, the Persians. Cyrus ordered the settling of Judah in about 536 BC but the chronology suggests that the “return” must have been in the decade 480-470 BC when a later group of settlers were moved in, perhaps Nehemiah’s group. In fact, the return happened several times over the whole of the fifth century.

Unfortunately for the historical confirmation of the stylized chronology of the Exodus tale, the Pharaohs in about 1440 BC, when it was supposed to have happened, were strong monarchs, Thutmose III and Amenhotep, who we know were not letting Canaanites go back to Canaan from Egypt but were subjugating the whole territory in a phase of colonial expansion. They were actually enslaving Canaanites rather than allowing them to escape slavery.

Inasmuch as there is any truth in Israel being “in Egypt”, it is more likely that notionally they were because Canaan was effectively a part of Egypt for several hundred years thereafter—indeed was almost always in the

Egyptian sphere of influence—a fact that the Persians wanted to change. All the indications are that, in the first part of the first millennium BC, Palestine was a colony or vassal of Egypt. Though the degree of domination was slight, the people looked to Egypt for protection.

Pharaoh Shoshenq affirmed Egyptian overlordship in the tenth century BC. An expedition against Sennacherib requested by Judah went out in 701 BC. Pharaoh Necho II led further expeditions around 600 BC. Finally, Judah asked for Egyptian help against the Babylonians, but it either failed or was not given. Egypt dominated Palestine until the “exile” and Egyptian names like Phinehas, Hophni, Assir (Osiris) and Pashur were not unusual in Palestine.

Since the biblical chronology looks impossible, the biblical “scholars” ignore it—they have no qualms about biblical inerrancy if they can find an unlikely historical match by declaring the Word of God slightly wrong! They declare the Exodus to have occurred 200 years later in the thirteenth century BC not the fifteenth century. This later date gets some credence from certain scriptural references that could place the Exodus in the time of Rameses II. Of course, there is no more historical evidence of this than there was for the earlier date, but such lack of evidence is “no proof that it did not happen” (an argument of their “scholars” that Christians have to get used to hearing).

The absence of evidence, they say, is because there was not one Moses and one Joshua but lots of little Moseses and Joshuas, who have been mythically conflated to create the story but actually slowly migrated into Palestine over about 200 years, too slowly to make any cultural impact on the country that is today detectable in archaeology. Convinced? Not even the biblicists are convinced. Their ultimate justification is that millions of Jews and Christians could not believe something that was not true! Nahum S Sarna writes:

No nation would be likely to invent for itself, and faithfully transmit century after century and millennium after millennium, an inglorious and inconvenient tradition of this nature unless it had an authentic core.

Sarna is a clever man, a professor and editor of the Jewish Publications Society of America, so it is hard to accept that he really thinks the story of the Jewish escape from Egypt and conquest of Canaan celebrated in the most venerable Jewish family celebration of Jewishness, the Passover, is “inglorious”. Presumably he means the many instances, recorded in the wanderings, of Israelite bad will and backsliding that the myth highlights, that “no nation” would want to feature about itself.

This though is the very point, utterly missed or rather not admitted by Sarna. The story was written by Persian administrators sent to secure the loyalty of the Jews for Persia, not Egypt. Their means was to win the local people to the Persian-styled god, Yehouah, based on Ahuramazda, and away from their traditional Canaanite and Egyptian deities. They used the myth, presented then as it was ever after as true history, to depict those loyal to the traditional gods and goddesses as apostates and backsliders from the true God of Israel, Yehouah, who had made a covenant with Moses, the ancestor of the Israelites who were escaping from Egypt.

The Jewish scriptures have the boringly uniform theme of warnings of apostasy against the Israelites, and their constant sliding back to their old ways and away from the true (new) god. Since worship of Yehouah in the form of a Canaanite Baal seems to have been one of the ancient Israelite sects, even worship of this old Yehouah was depicted as mistaken. The new god was a universal God of Heaven in the Persian mould and quite alien

to the Canaanites of the hill country of Judah.

## Rameses

Unwilling to consider the truth, the biblicists return to their effort to place the Exodus and conquest of Canaan in the 1200s BC. They see the Israelites in the Hyksos, who occupied Egypt from Asia between the 1700s and the 1500s BC, setting up the 15th and 16th dynasties. The resurgent Egyptians, especially in the vigorous 18th dynasty, then enslaved their former foreign masters but, in the reign of Rameses II, they escaped back to Canaan—the Hyksos were the Israelites all along! Rameses is mentioned in *Genesis* 47:11 and in *Exodus* 1:11 and that is proof enough for the biblical experts.

Biblicists are fond of saying glibly things like, “There is evidence that... so and so”, but then they do not cite either the evidence or the source. The reason is that the evidence is the believer’s faith in biblical truth. The evidence is what the bible says, but much of it has now been shown to be false. Professor Kyle McCarter Jr can write:

Many scholars believe the events described in the story of Joseph have an ultimate basis in historical fact. It has often been supposed... that Joseph lived during the so-called Hyksos period...

Such statements are devoid of any useful meaning except to dispose the reader to believe reliable historians have confirmed the bible. “Believing” and “supposing” means nothing whether someone is an expert or not. These “scholars” believe it because it is in the bible and for no other reason, but they will seek to pretend they have other reasons. And what is “an ultimate basis in historical fact”? Walter Scott’s novels doubtless have an ultimate basis in historical fact but does anyone not believe that they are fiction? We have to conclude that “many scholars” are ignorant. McCarter himself is more honest than the “many scholars” to which he refers, admitting:

It is unlikely that much of the information found in *Genesis* 37 and 39-47 is historically factual.

Rameses (1279-1212 BC) was a vigorous and famous pharaoh known for his building programme and his new city of Rameses featured in the story of Moses. If this is proof of authenticity, we have to assume that the Persian officials were such dunces they could not put a myth in a historical setting, yet the Persians had captured the civilisations of Babylon and Assyria in the land of the two rivers—a civilisation that went back as far as the Egyptians did, and had permanent archives written on clay tablets in their cuneiform script. Knowledge of the Assyrian diplomatic correspondence allowed the Persian governors to write the histories of Israel and Judah, so there is no reason why they should not have known of a suitable pharaoh to allocate to the enslavement period. Further, the towns Rameses and Pithom were still being mentioned in much later texts and so are compatible with a later date.

In Egyptian, Moses means “born of”, and therefore in most names means “son of”. Tutmoses is “born of Thoth” or “son of Thoth”. Rameses is “born of Ra”. Moses left Egypt, so it has always been assumed that his name (Mosha) was also *son of X* with an Egyptian god X suppressed. But the crowd in the fifth century, obliged to hear Ezra address them in a foreign tongue, heard what they thought was “Toorahmosha”. It was Ahuramazda. The myth of Moses emerging from the river to be the founder of the Jewish state was an invention of the

Ptolemies enhanced by the Maccabees who wrote allegories of the foundation of the state that they had founded in fact only then, in the second century BC. They used the legendary birth narrative of a real Mesopotamian king, Sargon I (2334-2279 BC), who ruled over Akkadia—Babylon and Sumer—two millennia before. Is it not strange that the early books of the Jewish scriptures supposedly relating events long before the Jews experienced the period of “exile” should draw so extensively on Mesopotamian legend?

The death of Rameses II was effectively the end of Egypt because no other strong native monarch ever came to the fore, and the period following his death was chaotic. Perhaps here was a chance for the putative Israelite slaves to escape. Unfortunately, at this point we find a historic reference to the Israelites and they are already apparently in Palestine! Pharaoh Merneptah (1212-1200 BC) commissioned a stele to announce his punishment expedition into Canaan. It tells us that the Israelites were already there (but that he wiped them out saying their “seed was no more”). The biblicists ignore the massacre and conclude that the Exodus must have been in about 1250 BC, the very time when Rameses II was in his prime.

Martin Noth is considered a great scholar and witness to the historicity of the Exodus, but he puts the Exodus in the reign of this last great Egyptian pharaoh, Rameses II, whose empire included all of Palestine as far as Syria and included Sinai. The escaping Egyptian slaves were therefore not escaping at all, but running from one part of the Egyptian empire into another nearby part.

Noth does not regard the two million or so escaping slaves as the nation of Israel, or even tribes—none of which existed—yet they supposedly imposed on the Israelite tribes their own religion. Giovanni Garbini, the Italian historian, considers this a greater miracle than the passage over the Red Sea. The story of the people settling in Palestine, for Garbini, was an adaptation of the story of the settling down there of the Philistines whose name the land still has.

## **The “Apiru”**

The el-Amarna letters, tablets of cuneiform correspondence from Egyptian colonial governors and foreign kings to the pharaoh, Akhenaten, in the fourteenth century BC, mention raiders called “Apiru” as causing trouble in the colony of Canaan. The biblicists identify the “Apiru” with the Israelites—Hebrews.

The el-Amarna letters and the ancient tablets of Ugarit in northern Canaan, indicate that the hill country of Palestine was densely wooded before the Mycenaean drought, and only sparsely populated. They do not mention Israel or Judah, and leave no place where they could have been. Only Jerusalem, Shechem, Hebron and Hazor are mentioned as towns. Jerusalem, in Egyptian records, was a city state ruled by an Egyptian vassal “king” and it is likely to have had the same status until the Palestinian statelets were established.

In the lowlands were many densely populated city states. Each city controlled an expanse of countryside, including some lesser towns, that it exploited—though the exploitation never seemed to lead to rebellion. The rebellions that commonly occurred were palace coups rather than uprisings of peasants. It was these unsuccessful nobles and their supporters or displaced princes that fled to the hillsides and the countryside that were the “Apiru”—outlaws.

Only at the end of the great Mycenaean drought and the deforestation that accompanied and followed it, with

the subsequent growth of population, were villages, terracing for gardening, and cisterns to capture water built in the hills. In none of this is there any convincing evidence of any cultural change. In other words, the changes were effected by local people recovering from the drought and not by a strange people, "Apiru" or whoever, entering from elsewhere with a different culture.

The changes noted can be seen in the archaeological record, but another problem is their dating. Biblicists like them to be about 1250 BC but more objective observers see them as being from 900 to 800 BC. The small states that rivalled Israel in the Exodus narrative and the subsequent history of Israel and Judah, namely Edom, Moab and Ammon, seemed not to have existed in the 1200s BC but actually arose about the same time as the states of Israel and Judah, at the beginning of the first millennium BC as a result of the drought lifting. Israel was mentioned on the stele of Merneptah but from the end of the thirteenth century BC silence reigned until the stele of Mesha of Moab in about 800 BC.

If the great Mycenaean drought was the drought of the biblical narrative that drove the Patriarchs into Egypt, they would have been settling there at about the time they should have been leaving. The Mycenaean drought was an extended period of drought in the eastern Mediterranean that caused a ferment of political change from about 1200 BC to about 800 BC. There is every reason why such an extended and devastating period of drought should be remembered in myth, and perhaps that is what we can read in the stories of Abraham and Jacob going down into Egypt, but only the memory of such a great drought is likely to be accurate. The notorious biblicist, W F Albright, actually said at the outset of his career in 1918:

The long memory possessed by semi-civilized people for historical fact is a pious fiction of over-zealous apologists.

Albright soon forgot his own words and set up a loyal school of "over-zealous apologists" that is still vigorous today, albeit with their backs pressed hard against the wall.

The rest of the Patriarchal story is myth, possibly allegorical, devised to explain how the Israelites got into Egypt in the first place. Historical background to this too could have been had from records that had become available to the Persians. A thirteenth century BC Egyptian record tells of a frontier official who allowed some shepherds to cross the frontier and settle near Per-Atum (biblical Pithom?) to keep themselves alive through the ka of the Pharaoh. Any Persian official could have read this.

## **The Plagues**

Most of the allusions in the Moses saga could otherwise have been had from anyone who knew of everyday life in Egypt. Using bricks for building rather than stone was a necessity in a river delta where no stone was available, and would have subsided into the clay if it had been brought in from upriver. (The pyramids were built at the head of the delta on bedrock.) Knowledge of such matters does not imply authenticity. Indeed, the author of *Genesis* is wrong in several important respects. The east wind does not scorch Egypt, it is the south wind. The east wind from the Arabian desert scorches Palestine. The titles and offices in the story of Joseph are not Egyptian. Potiphar is a genuine Egyptian name but one that did not appear until the last millennium BC not a millennium before. The same applies to Joseph's Egyptian name.

The plagues on the Egyptians represented the superiority of the Persian God of the Heavens over the old Egyptian and Canaanite gods. The Nile itself, the sun and many other entities, given bizarre animal headed representations, were gods in Egypt and these stood for the pre-exilic gods of the Israelites, some of whom they doubtless were, like the goddesses Hathor and Astarte, and perhaps the god, Thoth (Djehuti, Dwd—pronounced Dude, Jude?). The Pharaoh keeps conceding then relenting—all meant to dissuade the native Israelites of Canaan from vacillating about accepting their imposed god, Yehouah. They could never defy such a god any more than the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt could.

The myth of seven lean years is a Pagan myth known from Egyptian, Akkadian (Gilgamesh) and Canaanite sources, and in the latter is the result of Baal going awol for seven years at a time. Some of the stories about plagues undoubtedly existed already in old Egyptian cautionary tales like *The Admonitions of Ipu-wer* and *The Prophecy of Nefer-rohu*, that tell of calamities that overcome the country when piety is ignored. So the fact that the *Exodus* stories seem to reflect a genuine Egyptian provenance has no more value as proof of their authenticity than has the genuinely eighteenth century British Naval provenance of the Horatio Hornblower stories. These details prove only that the authors of the Moses cycle knew about Egypt.

The final plague of the death of the firstborn is certainly an early misrepresentation or misunderstanding of the death of the first fruits—the succession of earlier troubles led ultimately to the death of the produce of cultivation. Some of the other plagues such as those of mosquitos and flies are probably meant to be the same. There were probably originally five or seven plagues but errors in recollection or restoration when the library of Nehemiah had to be reconstructed from remnants will have led to repetition and confusion.

Five words in the Jewish scriptures are uniformly translated “plague” in English. They suggest that the author used different sources for his “plagues”. The words are really: an “affliction”, a “blow”, a “wonder”, a “natural sign” and a “supernatural sign”. Such mistranslation is dishonest and hides the fact that the story was probably not originally as uniform as it is made to seem through false translation and editing. Hail, one of the plagues of Egypt, is a real miracle because it is unknown there but is common in Palestine in winter.

## **Red Sea and Sinai Wanderings**

The supposed miracle at the Red Sea is agreed by all honest scholars to have been only vaguely set in the eastern Delta or at Lake Sirbonis to provide a plausible setting for it, because, as M Noth realized, there was no known setting for the original tale. The bible says the Israelites did not take the Way of the Philistines. The mention of it is anachronistic because there were no Philistines blocking the way. They had not yet settled, unless this is a later story than it pretends to be. It is! The text also contradicts this because the reference to reeds could only be true where reeds grow, namely in fresh water by the Way of the Sea in the north. They do not grow in the brackish (“bitter”) water to the south. Nothing is convincing in the rest of the itinerary, and some guesses of what it was require the Sea of Reeds to be the Gulf of Aqaba. This absence of agreement and confirmation is typical of nythology purporting to be history.

Even the parting of the Red Sea has detectable layers of tradition. One of the earliest dispenses with the supernatural and simply has the waters blown back by a continuous wind (*Ex 14:21*). This could be a valid explanation if the waters were shallow anyway. Some editor took this and made it into a miracle induced by Moses raising his arm. Another tradition slotted into the earlier one is that the Egyptian chariots were held up



as if having to drive through viscous mud or as if the wheels were falling off (*Ex* 14:24-25), and the charioteers decide to cease the pursuit.

Another tradition (*Ex* 15:19) is that the Israelites were crossing a sort of ford but the Egyptian chariots drove headstrong into the sea, presumably expecting it to be shallow but it was deep, and “the Lord brought the waters of the sea upon them” and the charioteers and their officers drowned. Here, the appearance of Mesopotamian words meaning “abyss” and “depth” betrays again that the authors were from Mesopotamia and suggest that this was the original version.

Considering that this was written in Ptolemaic Egypt not earlier than 300 BC, it is curious that Alexander the Great had an identical experience when he set out to conquer Asia about thirty years before! Josephus says of Alexander and his army moving along the coast of Asia Minor:

The Pamphylian Sea retired and afforded them a passage through itself, when they had no other way to go.

Josephus, *Antiquities* (Whiston) 2:16:5

In his notes, Whiston preserves the accounts of the four earlier authors who record this event. Callisthenes wrote, according to Eustathius:

The Pamphylian Sea did not only open a passage for Alexander, but, by rising and elevating its waters, did pay homage as its king.

Strabo's account is:

Now about Phaselis is that narrow passage, about the sea side, through which Alexander led his army. There is a mountain called Climax, which adjoins to the Sea of Pamphylia, leaving a narrow passage on the shore, which, in calm weather, is bare, so as to be passable by travellers. But when the sea overflows, it is covered to a great degree by the waves. Now then the ascent by the mountains being round about and steep, in still weather they make use of the road along the coast. But Alexander fell into the winter season, and committing himself chiefly to fortune, he marched on before the waves retired; and so it happened that they were a whole day in journeying over it, and were under water up to the navel.

Arrian's account is this:

When Alexander removed from Phaselis, he sent some part of his army over the mountains to Perga, which road the Thracians showed him. A difficult way it was, but short. However, he himself conducted those that were with him by the sea-shore. This road is impassable at any other time than when the north wind blows. But if the south wind prevail, there is no passing by the shore. Now at this time, after strong south winds, a north wind blew, and that not without the Divine Providence (as both he and they that were with him supposed), and afforded him as easy and quick passage.

Appian, comparing Caesar and Alexander said:

They both depended on their boldness and fortune, as much as their skill in war. As an instance of which, Alexander journeyed over a country without water in the heat of the summer to the oracle of Hammon, and quickly passed over the Bay of Pamphylia, when, by divine providence the sea was cut off.

An even earlier example, recently found but unknown to Whiston, was Sargon's boast:

But I, Sargon... led my army over the Tigris and the Euphrates at the peak of the flood, the spring flood, as dry ground.

Biblicists will say that the original one was that of Moses, having been dated by the chronology of the bible to the second millennium BC. Believers will, of course, believe, but there is no ground for it. Alexander seems to have really done it and been the model for the biblical parting of the sea.

The Sinai wanderings contain nothing to prove them as anything other than mythical.

The story after the miracle, from the Sea to Kadesh, is full of names of places touched on during the journey. They are all, without exception, unknown.

J A Soggin

The number of Israelites is impossible. Most of the place names in the narrative no longer exist, or rather never did. Archaeology offers no support for any of the places, even when they seem identifiable. When the Israelis occupied Sinai, from 1967 to 1982, they feverishly sought evidence of Moses and the Israelite wanderings. Under the pretence of doing salvage excavations to save sites from potential destruction, thousands of sites were examined and surveyed. Not a *matzah* of evidence was found of the mass exodus.

In going into Sinai, the Israelites were not escaping from Egypt. Archaeologist, Eliezer Oren, found that Egypt and Canaan were not separated by an almost impassable desert. The coastal strip from the Delta into Philistia was a ribbon development, a stretched out city, a busy route that had become almost urbanised along its whole length. The Sinai peninsula itself was part of Egypt, was economically important, was the entrance to Egypt from Asia, and so was well fortified and patrolled by the Egyptian army. People moved back and forth into Canaan from Egypt. Pottery found was a mixture of Egyptian and Canaanite. The grave goods found in the characteristic beehive shaped tombs were mixed also.

There was no barrier between Africa and Asia but a well used land bridge. It testifies that Canaan was for long an Egyptian colony, and the south of it retained cultural ties with Egypt even when the statelets there achieved their independence around 850 BC. Even the Canaanite coastal city states to the north, called Phœnicia, were manifestly within the Egyptian sphere of influence as many artefacts plainly show. Nevertheless, if Sinai was the route the escapers took, Soggin says it is certain that they went straight from the Sea of Reeds to Kadesh Barnea, and nowhere else in between.

The promulgation of the Torah at Mount Sinai is presented in detail from *Exodus* 19 to *Numbers* 10, the two books being really a single composition. Clearly linked themes occur before and after this long interpolation, showing it was plonked right in the middle of an existing account of the journey from Egypt to Canaan via Kadesh. The Sinai tradition itself was already a compilation of earlier traditions.

The incident at Sinai must therefore have been interpolated into the tradition of the direct route. The location of Mount Sinai is unknown—the extant tradition is only from the fourth century AD and, for Sinai to have been an active volcano, the story would have had to have been set in Arabia. So, it is a different tradition which, if based on history, could have come from anywhere else at all. It is impossible from the saga to identify the mountain called Sinai, but a sensible guess would be that it was really Zion, the mountain on which the Jerusalem temple was placed.

From the marking of the lintels onward, the story is meant to show how the God of Heaven had given them the land and would solve all the problems of the Israelite people. They hunger, thirst, get demoralized, turn to apostasy, get threatened, and so on, but those who remained loyal to the new god and his earthly agent would be delivered into the land of milk and honey. The story is transparently propaganda aimed at bribing and shaming people to turn to the God of Heaven, and warning them off their old deities.

The Golden Calf (*Ex 32*) was one of the warnings. The Canaanite religion reflected the climate of the country, according to Soggin. The Samaria ostraca of the eighth century show that Samaria was polytheistic. Theophoric names in Baal as well as Yehouah appear among the Royal officials. The people of biblical Israel seem not to have been intolerant of Baal in their religion. It follows that the intolerance must have come out of Judah, and Judah only became significant in Persian and Hellenistic times. But the bible also says that in Judah, before the destruction of Jerusalem (*2 Kg 23*), Baal was worshipped with Yehouah in the temple. Moreover, the figurines of Asherah and new inscriptions confirm what the fifth century Elerphantine papyri said—Yehouah had an associated goddess.

So, the original religion of the hill country was polytheistic, and among its elements undoubtedly was worship of a bull as representative of the god of storms. The rains in autumn made the land bloom, but the vegetation begins to die in the spring and by the heat of the summer only the hardy trees and shrubs were still alive, having evolved to withstand half a year's dessication. Baal, the Canaanite fertility god who in some aspects at least was a bull, also died in the spring when the god of death, Mot, arose for the summer. The autumn rains were the "seed of Baal" that fertilized the earth and the flocks. Mot was vanquished and the people celebrated. The bible depicts this fertility religion as orgiastic, and perhaps it was, but there is no external evidence of it being so. The Canaanite Autumn and Spring festivals of Baal's resurrection and death are the same as the Jewish festivals of Booths and Passover.

Moses complained that the Israelites built a Golden "Calf" (*Ex 32*), a deliberate biblical demeaning of the bull that signified the storm gods who brought rain and fertility. Yehouah was one of them. Yet, at the same time, the biblical authors maintain that Yehouah was giving instructions to his Chosen on how to build two cherubim (*Ex25:18*). If one figure is idolatry, then why are the other ones not?

The two cherubs are actually the throne of Yehouah, not representations of the God himself, and that is the Judaeo-Christian excuse, but an empty throne or pedestal for an invisible god was not unusual in the ancient near east. Deities, whether gods or goddesses, are commonly depicted standing or sitting on an associated animal acting as the throne or pedestal. Garbini points out that, in the Golden Calf incident, the bull image was the throne or pedestal of the storm god. The mighty god need not be depicted, but when it was, the bull was its footstool. If both cases, bull and cherubim, were simply the throne or pedestal of the god, then Moses's anger

looks hypocritical. Moreover, Aaron, whose plan it was to build the bull, was only mildly rebuked by his brother. Is it a case of nepotism by God's chief prophet?

The answer must be that an earlier tradition of the Moses saga was that the bull image was built legitimately, but later, this was considered as idolatry, and the cherubs were substituted expressly as a throne so that there could be no mistake. The well known trick used by priests when needing to change mythology is to tell people that they had misapprehended the myth. This happened here. The tablets of the law were what was important all along but the people had taken to the bull, which was a mistake. So, the bull incident was refashioned into an explicit error in the story.

It left Aaron, who in the original myth had encouraged the people to offer up their gold to make the bull, in limbo, but it was impossible for him to be punished as savagely as others because he had an important role in the cult, as the founder of the priesthood. So he was merely rebuked. The change of the myth also gave the mythologers the chance to bring in the Levites, a supposed tribe, but legitimised as favoured in cult matters in this revised mythical history. Only the Levites remained loyal, giving a justification for a priestly class equivalent to the Magi, while the thousands who were disloyal were murdered. Quite a severe warning, one might think.

From *2 Kings* 23:5, 20; *2 Chronicles* 34:5 and the massacre of 3000 people in the Golden Calf incident, some described as the brothers of the Levites, even though they were supposed to have all remained loyal, it seems that the earliest returners from exile, actually murdered the native priesthood by burning them, or an earlier priesthood of colonists was massacred by a later one. However, these are additions by the Levitical priests in the third century BC. The sheer intolerance of the Jewish God, the savagery and intolerance of His laws and the narrative savagery that the bible describes seems disgusting to religious skeptics, though Christians, who claim to have the same God, seem to think He is a god of love.

The tablets of the law in the episode of the Golden Calf had been inscribed on both surfaces, and were easily broken. Stone tablets were normally inscribed on one surface, being intended to be rested against or built into a structure as a monument, and would have needed a mallet to break. These were not stone tablets but the baked clay tablets used for inscribing cuneiform letters in Mesopotamia. The author was thinking in terms of Mesopotamian practices. When Moses arrived from Sinai with the covenant written on clay tablets, the revised story was that he found the Israelites apostatizing by reverting to the worship of a calf, so he broke the tablets, the Mesopotamian way of formally breaking a contract.

What is most remarkable, Garbini points out, is that no other oriental codex "from the Sumerian to that of Hammurabi, from the Assyrian to the Hittite" lays down laws of religious belief. While *Exodus* and *Leviticus* lays down the death penalty for any number of religious misdemeanours, equivalent legal systems of other countries in the ancient near east do not even mention religion.

The reason is the very polytheism of these countries and times that the monotheists hate. Polytheistic societies did not prescribe who or how people should worship. Towns or nations might have been under the protection of a specific god, but that was no excuse to offend all the others with the risk of divine vengeance despite the protection of their particular lord. Kings of countries were confident of the general piety of the people, and need not penalise them for worshipping this god or that. They could use any or all of them for their political purposes. Only a country working to impose a particular god, or type of god, needed to enforce it in law, and this could not

have happened in Palestine until after the Persian conquest.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?**  
**Moses And the Exodus (Part II)**

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### **The Sinai Covenant**

The Passover myth of *Exodus* 1-15 gave a new reason for the celebration of the seasonal new year when the sun crossed the celestial equator. The opportunity was there to constantly remind the Israelites that the Egyptians were their historic enemies. So the old spring equinoctial festival was given a new spin by associating it with the Exodus from Egypt and bondage. With this constant reminder, the Jews would become the ideal sentinels for Persia on the boundary of Egypt and Asia. Since this was also closely associated with the covenant of God with the Israelites on Sinai, the festival also reminded them that they were committed to a covenant with the new Persian god, and therefore with Persia.

If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people. For all the earth is mine.

*Exodus 19:5*

All the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord.

*Exodus 19:8*

In the third month after the Exodus, the community arrived at Sinai, where they were to enter into a covenant with God. Covenants with their gods had been commonly sealed by the peoples of Mesopotamia for centuries. They were ways of imposing law on to the people, especially subjugated people. There is not a scholar of the Ancient Near East who does not know this, but all pretend that the covenants in the bible are a different matter entirely. They insist all the covenants and all the gods are phony except for this one with the God of the Jews and Christians. This one is genuinely agreed with God!

The Mitanni, in a treaty with the Hittites of about 1375 BC, as in typical covenant treaties, calls on the gods to witness its terms. The Hittites called on the sun god. The Mitanni called on Mitra (Mithras). The name Mithras is from the Indo-European root "Mih", meaning "friend" and "contract", but which itself is from "mei", meaning "exchange".

The friendship or contract offered by Mithras to his devotees was an exchange between unequal partners with Mithras the greater one. Friendship or contracts imposed obligations on the parties. Mithras oversaw the affairs of his worshippers, and established justice for them. In return, his worshippers had to be upright in their dealings with others.

Because Mithras was "lord of the contract", a title frequently applied to him, the Persians invoked Mithras to preserve the sanctity of legal contracts. They associated him with fire, and like both Indian and Roman worshippers, the Persians concluded contracts before fires so that they might be made in the presence of



Mithras.

Mithras was a moral god concerned with the rightness of the action, and upholding the sanctity of the contract even when it was made with those who would break it. When traditional national gods looked after the welfare of the state and its wealthiest members, Mithras was the first moral deity who stood up for justice for all.

A relief of the first century BC shows Mithras shaking hands with a King Antiochus. Earlier Cyrus had shaken hands with Marduk in Babylon, and with Yehouah, according to the bible. Many such images exist of covenants being arranged by the ruler (on behalf of his subjects!) with a god and being sealed by the exchange of a ring. Here Moses comes down with tablets—the medium of writing in Mesopotamia not Arabia, Egypt or Palestine—but they served the same purpose, to seal the agreement.

The inspiration for the covenant and the particular form it took may be found in the political treaty of vassalage that frequently regulated international relations at the time. The suzerain (monarch) would make a contract with a vassal state, assuring it of protection in return for the vassal's exclusive and unreserved loyalty.

Nahum S Sarna

Israel was committing itself to fealty to Persia through the Persian God they were being obliged to adopt. A breach of loyalty to the god was a breach of loyalty to Persia.

Yehouah is shown calling upon Moses to occupy the land of Canaan (*Ex* 3:8;6:6-8). He makes no promise of a covenant. The various credal summaries of the Exodus story in the scriptures (*Dt* 26:5-9;6:21-23; *Josh* 24:2-13) do not include the story of the receiving of the covenant at Sinai. It looks as though the Sinai covenant was interpolated into the Exodus tale after *Joshua* and *Deuteronomy* were written. They have the stylistic qualities of the Deuteronomic writers. Several hymns and psalms that refer to the Exodus might also be expected to mention the Sinai covenant also, but do not (*1 Sam* 12:8; *Pss* 78;105;135-136). *Psalms* 106 mentions the Golden Calf but not the covenant. A statement definitely post-Persian conquest (*Neh* 9) does mention it. So the covenant looks to be associated with a late group of "returners"—probably Ezra's priests. The original purpose of the Exodus story was simply to justify the "returners" occupying the land of Israel.

Wellhausen, who shrewdly realized that the prophets preceded the law, thought that the covenant had been written into the Mosaic history at the time of the prophets. He was a few centuries out, the prophets and the law both being fifth century but the prophets preceding the law by about half a century or so. The purpose of the biblical prophets was to counter the prophets of the Canaanite Baals, probably shamans who prophesied under the influence of intoxicants or drugs like the Delphic oracles of Greece. Amos decries Amaziah.

Evidently one of the first ways the Persian deportees tried to influence the Canaanites was to introduce the ethical prophets of the God of Heaven to counter the traditional prophets of the country. The prophets were not interested in particular ethical matters but merely in loyalty and obedience to God. The sins that are mentioned are meant to show up the pre-Persian kings of Israel. They are oppression, cruelty, exploitation, greed and dishonesty. They raised these matters, though they were not unusually interested in them, simply to get over their main message—to get people to accept this strange God. If they accepted Him, they would be loyal and obedient to the god of the Persians and therefore would be reliable and lawful subjects. The main sin of the

people was not to accept Yehouah as their salvation.

Later the covenant was imposed by the Persians, delivered to the people of Israel as a historic covenant by the founder of the Israelites with their God in the depth of antiquity. Since then, of course, many had stumbled but their God had remained faithful. The references to the covenant in the so-called eighth century prophets are few and show that the covenant followed their writings, the few references there are being redactional. Isaiah and Micah hardly mention the Sinai saga. The covenant ( *berith* ) tradition has been said to be the work of the Deuteronomist.

Bizarrely some Christians decided that God had used as his model of a covenant the form used by Hittite monarchs at about the time the Sinai covenant was supposed to have happened. G E Mendenhall claimed an exclusively congenial context for the covenant in that the Hittites ceased as a power in about 1200 BC. This proved that the chronology was correct and the treaty was genuine! They have not explained why God should have chosen to copy Hittite treaties with a large body of Egyptian slaves who had probably never heard of the Hittites anyway.

And, if the God of Israel could make use of Hittite treaty forms, why not other nations closer to the heartland of the Hittites than Sinai and Palestine—like the Assyrians? In fact, that is just what did happen, the form of the Hittite treaties (which even themselves were common to earlier states) becoming the standard treaty form of the Near East for a thousand years. Its use in *Exodus* is therefore more likely to be through the Assyrians and Persians.

The form and ideology of the divine covenant in Israel was based on the pattern of the treaties between the suzerain and his vassal which were prevalent in the Ancient Near East.

Eryl W Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*

Mendenhall found nine elements in the Hittite treaties but not all were always present, certainly in other Ancient Near East treaties that were considered based on the Hittite form. The central elements, to which any of the remaining elements might be added, are:

1. A list of the gods of the suzerain and the vassal as witnesses to the treaty.
2. Stipulations laid upon the vassal as conditions for the treaty from the suzerain—tribute, non-hostility to other vassal states of the suzerain, not allying with any other power while allied with the suzerain, extradition, provision of soldiers and appearance in the suzerain's court as required.
3. A preamble, a historical review and a procedure for punishing the vassal if the treaty were violated in which the I/thou forms of address were used respectively for the suzerain and the vassal.
4. A list of curses and blessings to accompany the possible outcomes.
5. A formal oath of allegiance arranged at a public ceremony.
6. Informing the vassal's subjects by depositing the treaty in their temples and arranging for the treaty to be read on prescribed occasions.

The first element is illustrated by Assyrian treaties with the Medes and the Aramaeans. Listed along with the deities are often natural objects such as heaven, earth, mountains, springs and rivers, winds and clouds. In a treaty of Rameses II there occurs a list of a thousand gods to witness the treaty and then, "the mountains and

rivers of the land of Egypt, the sky, the earth, the great sea, the winds, the clouds". In the covenants of Yehouah, no such a list is appropriate because Yehouah is the only god, so only Yehouah himself appears as a witness and guarantor of the covenant. And yet heaven and earth do appear too, just as they do in the old treaties (*Dt* 4:26;30:19;31:28;32:1; *Isa* 1:2). McCarthy (*Treaty and Covenant*) says the whole of *Deuteronomy* has been influenced by Ancient Near Eastern treaty traditions.

Historical reviews often feature in God's covenants and instructions to his people. The treaties review the benefits conferred on the people of the subject state by the suzerain and the reactions expected of the vassal. In the scriptures these are paralleled by lists of the benefits conferred on His people by God and what he expects of them in return. In these God has the role of an eastern emperor and Israel that of a vassal state.

Most interesting is that the relationship between the suzerain and the vassal in the treaties is expressed in terms of blood kinship. The suzerain is the father and the vassal the son! The relationship Father to Son therefore signified the relationship of an overlord to his subordinate. Equal parties were called brothers. Compare their use in the scriptures (*Dt* 32:19; *Isa* 1:2; *Jer* 3:19; *Mal* 1:6). In the scriptures sons are condemned for seeking help from a third party (*Isa* 30:1) thus breaking the fidelity to the father (suzerain) that excluded dealings with others. In the Exodus story, God describes Israel as his first born son (*Ex* 4:22) thus linking an important feature of the treaty protocol with the Sinai covenant.

Christian commentators see the family relationship used by the prophets to depict God's relationship with Israel (*Hos* 1-3; 11:1-9; *Amos* 3:1-2; *Isa* 1:2-3) as an alternative, more personal way of expressing a relationship than the treaty forms, apparently failing to realize that family relations were used in the treaties.

Curiously, a word used often in the covenant treaties and in the scriptures clearly relates to the word for Passover (pesah, understood to mean "protect"). The verb "to rebel" (PSC) or revolt against an overlord appears frequently meaning the subject state's failure to meet the suzerain's stipulations (and forgo his protection?). It is not a word in general usage but a diplomatic or political term, so could hardly have been used in a religious context without a deliberate intention to use a diplomatic form. The scriptures use it in just the proper sense (*Isa* 1:2).

Besides diplomatic language, legal language is a feature of the covenants. The authors seem to be intent on making God as witness and upholder of the covenant sound like a judge. The agreement is considered as a legal entity between God and His people, and God is one of the parties, the witness and the judge in the breach. God often has the role of judge in the psalms, passing sentence on Israel and other nations.

*The Decalogue* (*Ex* 20:1-17) follows this sort of plan. The treaties were called the "words" of the suzerain and *The Decalogue* begins appropriately, "And God spoke these words..." God declares himself so He is the divine witness. He states His historical benefit to Israel in bringing her out of bondage in Egypt, then lists a catalogue of stipulations and obligations he required in return—the commandments. A required stipulation in the Near Eastern treaties was that the vassal would not seek any other overlord, and this appears as the first of the commandments. Some of the later proscriptions on injuring other people match the proscription in the treaties on injuring others of the suzerain's sons—his other vassals. Elsewhere, the commandments are inscribed on tablets and deposited in the Ark of the Covenant, a mobile temple. There are also provisions for re-reading the words (*Dt* 31:9-13). Curses and blessings are dotted about freely in the scriptures and so are not

separately listed. There are other examples (*Ex 19:3-8; 24:3-8; 34:10-28*).

Typically, some biblicists will not hear of the covenant being a Near Eastern treaty unless the form is a perfect fit. The agreement between the covenant and the ancient treaty form is far from rigid for several reasons. The treaties were not of a rigid form, God was a party to the covenant and was the only admissible witness, the national form of the treaty of Persian times has been changed to a set of personal commandments after the Persian defeat by Alexander, and finally the books of the bible have been re-written again in the Hellenistic period, notably by the Maccabees. So purity of form of anything in the scriptures is hardly to be expected. Even so, the treaty form of the covenant is still evident and it is still, to this day, deposited in temples (synagogues or churches) and is read out in public. Artaxerxes would have been amazed!

## The Covenant as a Vassalage Treaty

### The Covenant as a Vassalage Treaty

		Statements of the Covenant		
	Elements of the Treaty	Ex 20-31	Deut 1-32	Joshua 24
1.	Preamble: the author	20:1	1:1-5	24:2
2.	Historical Review: showing the benefactions of the suzerain	20:2	1:6-3:29	24:2-13
3.	Stipulations: obligations on the vassal...			
a.	...essential	20:3-17; 22-26	4,5-11	24:14-15
b.	...additional	21-23, 25-31	12-26	24:16-25
4.	Propagating the treaty locally...			
a.	...placing the treaty in the vassal's sanctuary	25:16; 40:22	31:9,24-26	24:26
b.	...publicly reading: to the subject people		31:10-13	
5.	Witnesses: the gods—Yehouah alone in the bible—and natural phenomena	24:4	31:28; 32:1	24:22; 27
6.	Curses and Blessings	Lev 26:14-20, 3-13	28:15-68, 1-14; 31:16-22; 27;29	24:19-20

Inasmuch as they are based on treaty forms, McCarthy sees them as fitting first millennium BC types not second millennium ones. Thus *Exodus* 24 is confirmed by a rite, the later practice, not by an oath. Moses in the fifteenth or thirteenth centuries BC would not have known about or followed a Hittite practice but a Moses myth composed in the fifth century could obviously have followed the practices current then in international treaty forms.

The treaty patterns in *Deuteronomy* are perhaps closer to the common form and are universally accepted as first millennium BC. The Exodus story and the Sinai tradition has also accreted later additions, for example by the priestly writer (*Ex* 19:3-8; 20:22-23:19, the *Book of the Covenant* 24:15b-31:18; 35-40; *Num* 1-10). Even *The Decalogue* (*Ex* 20:2-17) has been added because the passage in which it is set reads more comfortably when it runs from *Exodus* 19:19 directly to *Exodus* 20:18. What remains when these additions are excized is simply a theophany, with perhaps the earliest form of the covenant in *Exodus* 24:3-8, where the “blood of the covenant” and the sacrificing and sprinkling by young men rather than priests sounds primitive—there apparently being no priests—and not from the hand of the Deuteronomist. It is also depicted as simply a theophany elsewhere in the scriptures (*Dt* 33:2; *Jg* 5:5; *Ps* 68:9), no mention being made of the law or covenant in references to Sinai outside the Pentateuch. It seems to represent an early stage of the “return”.

To this primitive covenant, all the law codes were added subsequently, mostly, of course, by the priestly writers possibly in the Ptolemaic period. Prophets preceding Jeremiah are mainly silent about Moses and rarely use the word “berith” (covenant), but criticize the people for disobedience. Elements of the treaty forms might nevertheless be present in the prophetic writings through their use of woes, judgements curses perhaps reflecting the curses section of the treaties. The legal parts have also been related to the prophetic lawsuit (*rib*). The Prophets could not have avoided talking about Moses and the Sinai covenant had it really been a long known and central element of Jewish history.

The word “berith” is a word of the Deuteronomist school of “returners”, for whom Sinai becomes Horeb, but they had noticed the earlier theophany with its crude covenant and altered it to fit their improved ideas. Sinai obvious refers to the god, Sin, suggesting that the people who composed the original were formerly worshippers of Sin and were from Harran. Ai is another god from Syria, who might have been the same as Ia (Yehouah) or confused with him, and so Sinai means “Yehouah is Sin”.

## **The Ark of the Covenant to Balaam**

The Ark of the Covenant is constructed as the place where the tablets of the renewed covenant will be kept. The Ark is similar to the devices used by nomadic tribes of the time for housing and transporting their idols. Cherubim were inscribed on the sides of the Ark, the winged figures that represented the Persian god, Ahuramazda. The myth is plainly invention because the wealth and skill implied for its construction was hardly what impoverished bricklaying slaves would have. Someone has noticed this and has explained the discrepancy by stating that the Israelites had robbed their Egyptian masters (*Ex* 12:36) when they left Egypt!

No less a scholar than the great Julius Wellhausen pointed out that the story of the tabernacles is an idea of the priests retrojected in history. That is what practically the whole of the Jewish scriptures is too.

The horde of Israelites stayed at Kadesh-Barnea for 38 years and must have left some sort of detectable impact

upon their surroundings surely. Archaeology can find no trace of anything there before the tenth century BC. The model of the Israelites on the move is likely to be much later. Greek instances of mobile cities admittedly go back to about 1200 BC, but are better known in the fourth century BC.

The Greek tyrants of the late archaic age signified their inter-state family ties through names. Herodotus remarked that Pisistratus was named after the son of Neleus of Pylos as a way of indicating his family's connexion with the early Athenian kings, Melanthus and Codrus. Parentage was essential to one's identity in antiquity, not only in terms of heredity but the degree of citizenship—full membership, with its rights and privileges, or slavery, and a range of classes, each consenting to its status through birth, between these two poles. It was effectively a caste system. Land ownership was important to the communities of the Greek city-states. It was often a *sine qua non* of full membership in the community.

Those who lacked the wherewithal of citizenship became wanderers—"planomenoi". Matthew F Trundle, discussing Greek mercenaries in *Ancient History Bulletin* says:

Those who had suffered exile from their native state theoretically had lost their identity as well as their community. Exile was a theme of Greek politics... Exiles were on the increase in the Greek world of the fourth century BC.

Wanderers and their families formed moving communities. They had no land and no traditions. The armed male heads of households and their sons had an original status from their position before their exile or loss of landholding rights. Thereafter, they maintained their status simply as a "kyrios" having authority within the "oikos". Such wanderers joined together to form larger communities, becoming wandering cities. The Sea People evidently organized this way. They too were moving cities.

Similar were the roving armies overseas of the fourth century where the armed body of men formed the assembly of "citizens" politically organized below the army's commanders who made up the political council. Camp followers and families, as with any army, accompanied them. G B Nussbaum illustrated the mercenary army as the rootless city-state using as his example the Cyreans who Cyrus the Younger had employed to overthrow his brother, the Great King of Persia, in 401 BC. The mobile city of the Israelites in the exodus reflects this model.

The Moses saga continues with further rebellions of the wilful Israelites overcome, and the Levites under Aaron again being confirmed as the upholders of God. Scholars have seen in the points of this story (*Num* 16-17) a disguised history of Levitical struggle. Doubtless all of it and some of the stories of the Patriarchs are allegories of the struggles of the settlers, against the Am ha-Eretz and against each other, to get control of the colony from the edict of Cyrus to the final establishment of the new religion about a hundred years later. Moses is an allegorical Ezra (or Nehemiah), the Persian administrator who finally establishes the new religion.

*Nehemiah* 8 clearly describes Ezra reading the law, specified as the law of Moses, to the people at the Feast of Booths. If Moses delivered this law in 1300 BC and it was ever after considered so important, why did Ezra have to re-introduce it to the Israelites in the fifth century BC? The plain fact is that this is when the law was introduced to the Israelites. It is most likely that Ezra was Moses, insofar as he it was who introduced the law to the Canaanites of the Palestinian Hill Country.



In *Numbers* 20:21-29, the Israelites fight a battle and occupy the region of Heshbon. No archaeological evidence of any presence before 900 BC has ever been found there. Of the biblical names for people living in the region, Canaanite, Amorite and Hittite were simply alternative designations for Canaanites, the latter two being Mesopotamian words for Syrian people. Nothing is known in history about the Hivites, Perizzites, Gergashites and Jebusites who also appear. It must be considered that these are allegorical names for factions that opposed the “returners”.

The story of Balaam is introduced. A seventh century BC inscription mentioning Balaam has been uncovered in Jordan. It seems that he was a Moabite Merlin, but he could have had nothing to do with the thirteenth century Moses as Moab did not exist then.

Most of the cities along the alleged route that the Israelites travelled immediately before reaching the Jordan River—Iyyim, Divon, Almon-divlatayim, Nevo, and Avel Shittim (*Num* 33:45-50)—have not been located, and those that have been found did not exist at the time of the supposed exodus. Yet Charles Krahmalkov notes what are apparently the same names on the walls of the Egyptian temple of Karnak, recorded in the same order as in the bible. If the places are marked on the temple walls in precisely the same order, and are so obviously places on the way from Egypt to Canaan, then that could have been the source of them used by the much later author.

Graffiti found on the walls of the Chapel of Achoris at Karnak are dated to the fourth century BC. The first five names are Greek and a further fifty-five names are in Cypriote syllabic script. They probably were the names of mercenaries from Cyprus stationed at Karnak. More Greeks died fighting in the service of the Persians than died in the defence of Greece in the Persian wars. The Greeks in the army of Darius III fought loyally for him against Alexander the Great. Greeks in the Persian army and Alexander's Greeks must then have seen the walls of the temple at Karnak. By the third century, the Ptolemaic Greeks had integrated with the Egyptians, and been able to translate the inscriptions at Karnak for inclusion in the newly written *Septuagint*.

## **Successive “Returns”**

The Israelite religion before the Babylonian conquest was Canaanite. The local god was called Yehouah but his title was the same as that of other Canaanite gods, and it still is. His title was Baal—Lord! Admitting this, biblicists like to think that the Canaanite version of Yehouah was an aberration, a falling back of the people to idolatry just as they had done when Moses ascended the mountain and they immediately took to bull worship. The experts tell us the prophets in the 800s, 700s and 600s constantly warned the people to return to the true god, the God introduced by Moses, but they failed to mention Moses and the people failed to take any notice.

The truth is that the books of the prophets are all post-exilic, written as warnings to the natives in Palestine to back the new god the Persians were trying to introduce as the true God of the Israelites, and His temple. The strategy was to pretend that the people had always been ready to backslide from the proper worship of the true god, so they invented a history to prove it, but Moses was not important in it, if he appeared at all. Not only that, but they wrote pseudepigraphic prophecies that the true god would punish them for their backsliding. Since they were writing these after the events or after mythical events had been invented, they were able to put convincing prophecy into the mouths of the prophets. The Persians depicted Jewish prophets in the days of the monarchy

as incessantly warning the people not to apostatize. They always did! The saga of the Exodus must have been one of the last additions to the history.

The priest-administrators had to justify their own position, the situation of the state as a loyal subject of the Persian king and the wretchedness of the people who had to find tribute for the temple and the Persian king out of their stony soil. Their wretchedness was God's punishment for them for previously backsliding, but with the grace of God and their own commitment to obedience, they might be saved.

The Persians covered their introduction of new laws and histories by pretending to find lost books of scripture, like *Deuteronomy* (Second Law—so-called by Christians: First Law, really), which like the prophets they again back-dated into the monarchy. Ezra introduced these as new laws that the people could not even understand—the law of Moses. They are now all in the Jewish scriptures as the priestly rules of temple worship and sacrifice.

We are confronted with highly idealized attempts at reconstructing the past, the aim of which was not to transmit a precise framework for the pre-exilic history, far less for the pre-monarchial history of Israel and Judah.

J Alberto Soggin

Textual analysis of the scriptures long ago found different sources, notably the J, E, P and D sources in the Pentateuch. The J and E sources, mainly of *Genesis*, are considered the oldest layer of writing in the bible, J standing for the use of Yehouah as the name of God, and E standing for the use of El or Elohim as the name of God. We have two gods here at the very least, and “Elohim” is an odd name for a single god because it has the form of a plural noun. Once again, these distinctions mean nothing to those innocents that read the bible in English, because the translators eliminate this implication of polytheism by translating all of them as God or Lord.

There is no avoiding the fact that there must have been two schools or more involved in writing the stories of *Genesis* and attributing them to quite different gods. El was the Canaanite high god, as is known from extra-biblical sources, and Yehouah or Yeho was a lesser god, identified even in the bible as a son of El. The presence of both in parts of the scriptures must testify to a disagreement among the “returners” about which of the Canaanite gods to make into the God of Heaven.

The god, El, seems the obvious choice as the high god, but people evidently were more devoted to their Baals, the sons of the high god, as being more personal and accessible. The local Baal was Yehouah. Different versions of the early books of the bible must have been written by the first “returners” to suit the different factions, but Yehouah seems to have soon prevailed, and the state came to be called Judah and the people Yehudim—those who worship Yehouah—instead of Israel—“we are the sons of El”—and Israelites.

Julius Wellhausen long ago pointed out that Israel and Judah were never two separate small states but were the same place—the hill country of Palestine. Israel was its name before the Persian administration and Judah its name during and after it.

There might be traces in *Genesis* of ancient Canaanite myth, though most of the biblical mythology is Mesopotamian. Familiar material to the Canaanites will at first have been written into the new polemical books

of the “returners” to allow the Am ha-Eretz to identify with the re-cast mythology. The next phase of “returners” were the ones who discovered *Deuteronomy* and wrote the *Deuteronomistic History*, inserting new references into the earlier books at key points to set the framework for the additions. This school has also been involved in writing *Hosea*, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel* and perhaps *Amos*. *Haggai*, and proto-*Zechariah* are from shortly after the “exile” and Third-*Isaiah*, *Obadiah* and *Malachi* are all later still.

The book of *Deuteronomy* was supposedly found by Josiah before the “exile” but was really introduced by a new group of “returners”. The discovery was cast back in time two hundred years to shortly before the defeat of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, a time that nobody would remember because the rulers who knew and recorded history had all been deported. It allowed the administrators to claim that the reforms had already been started by kings before the deportation by the Babylonians, and were not being imposed by the Persian Satraps. The Deuteronomistic school revised the works of the earlier less effective “returners” and effectively produced the first complete version of the Jewish scriptures. Probably later additions were the extensive Priestly laws meant to enslave the people to raise tithes.

*Deuteronomy* is the origin and first book of the bible. It is the law read out to the sobbing people by Ezra. It then had to be read out regularly to the people, being the basis of modern church services. The colonists added to *Deuteronomy* a pseudo-history, the Deuteronomistic History, that depicted the kings and people of the country as being inveterate apostates from the true God. It gave lots of material to the priests to offer to the people in their exhortations that accompanied the readings of the law. The earlier “returners” had allegorized some of the troubles they had experienced in the century before Ezra arrived. It made up *Judges* and parts of *Joshua*. Earlier allegories of the arrival of people from Syria (Aram) were combined with myths brought with them from Syria and Mesopotamia. Later they were to make up *Genesis*. The Egyptian priests under the Ptolemies, who themselves sought to use the temple state for their own ends, added *Exodus* and *Numbers*, and *Leviticus* was added about the same time to codify all the additional laws that the priests of the temple cult, now independent of the Persians, wanted to generate riches faster. The first four books of the *Pentateuch* were additions to the original one, *Deuteronomy*, as was the beginning of *Joshua*, and the history, and all were substantially edited by P, the priestly school to seem coherent.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?**  
**Moses And the Exodus (Part III)**

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### **Historical Criteria**

The biblicists use different criteria for the Jewish scriptures than they use for other historical accounts in the ancient Near East in the same period. They recognize that Egyptian Pharaohs glorified themselves and their reign by building grand temples inscribed with their public benefits and deeds, and monuments and stelae similarly inscribed. Other great kings of the ancient Near East did the same. None of this applies to the Jewish scriptures, however. While all these other public declarations are heavily laced with propaganda, the bible is true!

Unfortunately, it is just as much propaganda as the others—or more so. It was aimed at winning over a dissident people to the side of the Persians. The Persian kings realized they could not get a subjugated people to love them but they thought they could get them to love a common god—the universal God of Heaven. That was why they wrote the books of the Jewish bible. Their ploy worked far better than they had reason to expect. Doubtless they would be astonished to know that their propaganda still survives though the civilisation that founded it was destroyed 2,300 years ago by the Greeks.

In all honesty, there is no even remotely contemporary evidence, literary, inscriptional or archaeological of Moses or the Exodus outside of the Jewish scriptures, and the internal chronology of the scriptures is useless historically because it is manifestly symbolic. Despite this utter lack of evidence, the biblicists tell us it does not mean the account is not true.

Herodotus, a Greek writer born in Asia Minor about 484 BC, was known as the Father of History, even though the work of Moses was supposed to have been written a thousand years earlier. In his famous *Histories*, written about 450 BC, he knew of the peoples of Syria but did not mention Jerusalem or Judah nor the Jewish settlements in Egypt. Notionally, based on the bible, the two peoples had been in contact on the Nile Delta of Egypt since 600 BC, but Greek writers betray no knowledge of these Egyptian Jews. Herodotus was silent on Abraham, Israel, David, Solomon, Moses, the temple, and all of that famous long history.

Aristotle did not mention the Jews, not even in connexion with his comment on the Dead Sea, but his student, Clearchus of Soli, around 300 BC, quoted Aristotle as describing a Jew he had met in Asia Minor. This Jew, like many subsequent ones, tried to compare favourably the principles of the Greeks with the teachings of the Jewish God. Clearchus is the earliest Greek writer to give a decent transliteration of “Jerusalem”, but, despite his information, the Greeks remained unaware of the Jews as a separate nation in the Levant. The extract implied he was the first of his kind met by the Greeks. Alexander brought Jews and Greeks together, and revealed the Jews to the Greek world. From the date of Clearchus, the Jew he spoke of might really have been met after Alexander’s invasion, making even more significant the Greek world’s ignorance of the Jews before it.

Josephus relates that the High Priest Jaddua refused to obey the conqueror’s summons from Tyre because of

his oath of fealty to the Persians. To punish him Alexander marched on Jerusalem from Gaza, and Jaddua, told by God in a dream, met him at Sapha, dressed in his robes of office and wearing the mitre bearing the sacred name. To the astonishment of his generals, Alexander saluted Jaddua and adored the name, for Jaddua had appeared to him in a dream in Macedonia and urged him to march against the Persians. Alexander went with the High Priest into the temple, offered sacrifices, was shown the prophecies of Daniel concerning himself, and gave permission to the Jews, not only of Judah but of Media and Babylonia, to live under their own laws.

No other writer states that Jerusalem was visited by Alexander, and it looks strange that a gentile would be allowed to sacrifice in the temple of the peculiarly exclusive Jews. Moreover, the prophecies of Daniel were not yet written. Typically of biblical prophecies, they were written about 160 years later! Arrian mentions no detour from Gaza to Jerusalem but rather implies that Alexander went straight to Egypt. Some recollection of such a visit would surely have been preserved by other Jews. Alexander appears by name in only one Jewish book (*1 Macc* 1:1-8; 6:2) with no suggestion of a visit to Jerusalem, or of special treatment for the Jews. Nor do the histories of his expedition mention any acquaintance with the Jerusalem temple, its ceremonies and its books, even though they carefully describe his visit to Gordium after the battle of Issus, his relations with the oracle of Amon, and his worship of Bel at Babylon. Nor do those Greeks who took an interest in Jerusalem once it had been revealed to the west ever mention Alexander's visit.

Not until the second century before Christ, did Hellenist historians and tragic and epic poets—Demetrius, Eupolemus, Artapanus, Aristeeas, Ezekiel, Pseudo-Philo, and Theodotus—begin to describe Jewish history, more than a thousand years after it was supposed to have started, and sang of the Exodus, Jerusalem, and the rape of Dinah. This burst of activity and interest in the Jewish scriptures, rabbis and parsons explain by the translation of the Jewish scriptures into Greek. In fact, the *Septuagint* was not fully translated into Greek until the middle of the second century BC, as the *Jewish Encyclopedia* admits, and perhaps even later still. Nothing at all had been heard of Judaism or the Jewish scriptures before this time. But in Egypt, the Egyptian priest, Manetho—who provided the the Egyptian list of kings still relied upon by Egyptologists—under Ptolemy II Philadelphus (282-246 BC) had written a history of Egypt in Greek, in which he related the fables of the Jews. What he wrote could have been the earliest form of the Jewish scriptures as we know them. The great Jewish leader Moses was heard of nowhere else before.

## **Jewish Forgeries**

So, Hellenistic Jews cleverly sought to forge ancient works in the name of Pagan authorities, and in Pagan form as propaganda for Judaism. The poet Phocylides of Miletus of the sixth century BC, has his name on a fragmentary book which includes, maxims of various kinds, that closely echo the *Old Testament*, especially the *Pentateuch*. It is a first century AD forgery.

Jewish and Christian apologists claim other verses by Greek poets suggest a Jewish inspiration. Most of these lines are forgeries from a source called *On the Jews* or *On Abraham*, a glorification of Judaism supposedly by Hecataëus of Abdera (c 300 BC), a companion of Ptolemy I Soter (323-282 BC), and near contemporary of Manetho.

Pseudo-Hecataëus related Jewish origins and customs in what purports to be a digression from his main work on Egypt, apparently the work of the genuine Hecataëus. He had a legend of the Egyptian origin of the Jews

who, according to a surviving fragment, fled Egypt after plagues and made their way with Moses to Jerusalem. Manetho, shortly after, expanded the story, then Lysimachus added his contribution, according to Josephus in *Contra Apionem*. Moses was a rebellious Egyptian priest who made himself the head of a colony of lepers, and was expelled from Egypt with his leprous gang by some Pharaoh. The leper colony does not have to be taken literally. Leper was an insulting word.

Hecataeus offered several alternative versions, all derogatory to Moses, showing that these “historians” were seeking an alternative to the Egyptian bondage and liberation story propagated by the Persians. Extracts supposedly of Hecataeus in Josephus show the author cited there was ignorant of Greek augural lore. They cannot be what any educated Greek writer must have known. The attitude to the destruction of Pagan temples and altars is unimaginable in a Greek author, and the impossibly Jewish ideas it attributes to the Greek playwright, Sophocles, shows it to be a Jewish forgery. Aristaeas the Exegete, Josephus, Clement of Alexandria, Diodorus Siculus and Origen all quote from it. In the third century AD, Origen noted that Herennius Philo doubted the authenticity of this same book in the second century.

The forger of Hecataeus attempts an excuse for the absence of any references to Judaism until then. Josephus quotes Hecataeus as writing that earlier poets and historians have not mentioned the Law or the Jewish people because the Law was holy and “not to be discussed openly by profane mouths”, these latter words being an explanatory gloss. Josephus also says that the High Priest, Hezekiah, in the time of Ptolemy I, a man “expert in business” went with a group of followers under an agreement with Ptolemy to Alexandria. It sounds right. Ptolemy doubtless wanted to pander to the large number of Jews in Alexandria, and to the Jerusalem priesthood, at the same time. A period of Ptolemaic indulgence with Jerusalem culminated in the revision and translation into Greek of the *Pentateuch* in the decades coming up to 200 BC. Just at that point Seleucia took over Jerusalem, and a new stage began. The trouble is no high priest named Hezekiah is otherwise known in this period, but perhaps it was expedient to erase his memory.

When were these works of Hecataeus forged? Jewish attitudes to persecution and martyrdom are implausible before the age of Antiochus Epiphanes. Josephus in *Against Apion* attributes to Hecataeus the story that Alexander the Great gave Samaria to the Jews tax-free for their loyalty to him. Alexander seems to have made Samaria a Macedonian colony, but *1 Maccabees* 11:34 says Demetrius II made a partial gift of three districts in 145 BC. It suggests the forger worked some time after this, so not before about 100 BC. N Walter and B Z Wacholder distinguish two pseudo-Hecataeuses. The first wrote **On the Jews** towards 100 BC, and another author, also confused with Hecataeus, wrote *On Abraham* between then and Josephus. The *Letter of Aristaeas*, to Philocrates on the Greek translation of the Jewish law, is similarly dated between 118 BC and 113 BC.

## The Letter of Aristaeas

The story of the Exodus has been built up in layers, and, soon the Ptolemies realised they were taking the wrong tack. They were alienating the Jews when they needed them as allies, just as the Persians did. They began sponsoring the Jerusalem temple and its priesthood financially, and offered to help them write up an accurate history of the people and their temple. These they would place in the massive library they were collecting in Alexandria in Greek and Hebrew, the Jerusalem priests having decided to use sixth century Hebrew as their sacred language though everyone was speaking Aramaic in everyday life.



The *Letter of Aristeas*, paraphrased by Josephus in *Antiquities*, relates in mythical form how the Jewish Torah was translated into Greek. The name, *Septuagint*, of Jewish scriptures in Greek comes from this story. It relates to the time when Demetrius Phalerus was the librarian of the Alexandrine Library in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-247 BC) and specifically to the time of Queen Arsinoë (278-270 BC). The Greek king, Ptolemy, allegedly wrote to the High Priest in Jerusalem saying he wanted to translate the Jewish law into Greek for the wonderful new library the Ptolemies were creating in Alexandria. It would benefit the many Greek speaking Jews of that city, some of whom had been “uprooted” from Jerusalem by the Persians, and others who were brought into Alexandria more recently as captives by “our fathers”—Alexander’s conquering Greeks. The mention of the Persians in this context was probably propaganda intended to relieve the Greeks of the whole burden of displacing Jews from the Palestinian hills, and to distance the first century Jews who would be reading this “letter” from their own founding fathers, the Persians. When the Persians had set up the temple state, they had moved in new colonists and thereafter had no wish to alienate them and risk driving them back into the sphere of the Egyptians.

Given that there were a large number of Jews in Alexandria, many of whom, even if not most, ought to have spoken Hebrew—especially as many had been taken as slaves and had only recently been ransomed from slavery—it is hard to know why translators had to be requested from Jerusalem. Hebrew might have been better understood in Jerusalem but Greek must have been better understood in Alexandria. The myth is to puff the Jerusalem temple and its priesthood, and the names of the translators are given as Jerusalem names not Egyptian or Greek ones. Giovanni Garbini, whose expertise is in language, highlights the passage in the letter that gives away the truth—that the books were not simply being translated but were being re-written. Demetrius is described as writing:

Scrolls of the law of the Jews, together with a few others, are missing from the library, for these books are written in Hebrew characters and language. But they have been transcribed somewhat carelessly, and not as they should be, according to the report of the experts, because they have not received royal patronage.

Here are two contradictory reasons for the work of translation. The original scrolls are missing and replacements were evidently needed. Yet, the library’s Hebrew experts knew they were wrong, anyway, so replacements were needed to correct faulty translations! It sets a perfect scene for the legal experts from Jerusalem and Alexandria to get together and remodel the Jewish laws. The translation exercise had led them to realise the errors in the originals so that the originals were altered too! Aristobulus at the time of the Maccabees claimed the exodus and conquest stories had already been translated—he says at the time of Pythagoras—but they were really translated about 100 years before Aristobulus wrote, effectively re-written in the form more or less we have them now—by the Ptolemaic priests. Before that there had been no exodus, though the Jews had been slaves of Egyptian colonists, and the conquest was an allegory of what is now called the “return”.

In these revised histories of the Jews, in the third century BC, the original story will have been ameliorating for the Egyptians. They could not change the, by then, well established story of Egyptian bondage, but the Egyptians were to be presented as generally generous and helpful to the Aramaeans and Israelites in giving assistance to them in hard times, promoting them to high office and showing Pharaoh as being kind to Abraham and his wife, Sarah, as soon as he realised they were married and not brother and sister. Pharaoh allowed the Israelites to leave, as he did the Hyksos of Avaris centuries before, and the incident of the Red Sea will have

been taken from the recent exploit of Alexander, whose army crossed a bay in Asia Minor as the tide came in to save a long diversion, and only just made it across, his men ending up wading deep in the water.

The part that had to be presented as harsh, because of the established folk tale, was made into a drama directed by God with impossible miracles to mark it all as myth, but believers can believe anything, and, when Egypt was taken over by the Romans, the guardians of the truth vanished, and soon so did the temple in Jerusalem itself, so that only the impossible myths remained, recorded apparently as true history. Not only that, but the myth became the cement that kept Jews distinct, with their Passover ceremony celebrating the exodus from Egypt, and thus keeping alive an absurdity.

The next layer was added by the Seleucid kings of Syria, the new rulers of Judah, whose enemies were the Egyptian Ptolemies. They wanted to make the Egyptians anathema again to the Jews, and perhaps added the wicked Pharaoh, the plagues and modified the incident of the swamping of pharaoh's army. It seems, from *Maccabees*, that during the civil war of the Hasmonians against the Greeks and Hellenised Jews in the second century, that the library of Nehemiah, presumably left by the Persians for their colonists and added to, as noted here over the succeeding years, was attacked and the sacred texts damaged and scattered. When the Maccabees won the war, they attempted to piece the remains together again, but took the chance to add new compositions, where they had been lost or new ones seemed appropriate. It is the reason why some incidents appear as doublets or even triplets, from different earlier versions, and why some stories are virtually complete romances, hardly edited at all. The exodus story is mainly a late romance as is evident from even a reading of the English versions.

The collaboration of the Alexandrine library with the Jerusalem priesthood under the patronage of Ptolemy allowed the Torah to be extended from a single book of *Deuteronomy* to something much closer to what we now have, except perhaps for *Genesis*, which Aristobulus seems to know nothing about. There was no *Genesis* in the original *Pentateuch*, but it was still five books because then *Joshua* was the fifth one. As Garbini notes, the beginning of *Exodus* probably contained some elements of *Genesis* which otherwise was contained in separate writings. When it was enlarged by compiling them all together and adding new compositions like the Joseph saga, it became a new book, and *Joshua* had to drop out of the *Pentateuch*, if it was to be the first five books of the Jewish scriptures. *Joshua* is obviously the continuation of the saga of Moses, and so looks uncomfortable separated from the *Pentateuch*, accounting for the development of the theory of the *Hexateuch*. That is, of course what it really is, but the tradition of the *Pentateuch* was too strong to admit of a *Hexateuch*.

Elsewhere in the *Letter of Aristeas*, the author, supposed to have been the contemporary historian, Aristeas, confirms our suspicions:

I have previously sent you an account of what I regarded as the most memorable matters. We received this account of the people of the Jews from the most renowned high priests in renowned Egypt.

The author is excusing the extension of the story by saying it came from reputable Egyptian priests. Egypt had a long history that everyone admired, and its priests were guardians of it. Any Egyptian Moses must have been in their archives, and naturally they were claiming he was, whence their authority to write about the exodus properly. So, here is confirmation that *Exodus* and *Numbers* were written in collaboration with the scholars of Ptolemy Philadelphus. *Leviticus* will have been added at this time too, and the conquest by Joshua adapted

and added to.

G Larssen (*JBL*, 1983) dates the priestly redaction of the *Pentateuch* to the latter half of the third century BC, under the Ptolemies. He says "P" is a collection of old and new source material "supplemented with new written texts". Opinion puts the date of the *Pentateuch* to the end of the third century.

The texts which were to be put into Greek at Alexandria were new texts which gave a new face to Judaism.

G Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel*

The repeated mention of Hebrew characters in the *Letter of Aristeas* is now known to mean the old Hebrew (Phœnician) script, and not the Aramaic characters that are paradoxically now used for Hebrew. Hebrew script was used in some of the Qumran fragments. Garbini has shown that this script is phony in that it never was used continuously from the sixth century. It never evolved from then, when it stopped being used. It was only revived again at the end of the third century, coinciding with the translation of the *Pentateuch* into Greek. So, in fact, the *Pentateuch* was being translated twice, into Greek, and into Hebrew written in the archaic script. The old disused alphabet was copied as it was on old inscriptions for re-use in this Hebrew revival. Jews stopped using it again about the time of the Bar Kosiba revolt, when the Samaritans started to use it.

## The Age of Scriptural Invention

Demetrius, a Jew living at Alexandria in Egypt also under the Ptolemies, wrote a work on the Jewish kings. One fragment takes the history up to Ptolemy IV Philopator (221-204 BC). Proper names and characteristic expressions show Demetrius used the *Septuagint* not the Hebrew scriptures, the first writer to do so even though he was a Jew, and so this date gives a good idea of when books of the *Septuagint* were first available. The fragments of this history that have been preserved by Alexander Polyhistor (80-40 BC), whose own works have also been lost but appear in fragments in Josephus and Eusebius, are about the legends of Jacob and Moses, and say nothing about the Jewish kings, but Moses has appeared outside the bible.

The Palestinian Jew, Eupolemus (158 BC), the son of John, the son of Accos (*1 Macc* 8:17 and *2 Macc* 4:11) drawing upon other traditions besides the biblical accounts, wrote *On the Kings in Judea*, fragments from which are in Alexander Polyhistor. Eupolemus, a diplomat and a friend of the Jewish ruler Judas Maccabee, was sent with Jason, son of Eleazar, on to Rome in 161 BC to get support from the Romans for the Hasmonean uprising against the Greek rulers. The Romans gave it, boosting the rebellion. Eupolemus wanted to show that the Jewish people went back further in history than the Greeks. In one fragment, Eupolemus says Moses taught writing to the Jews, who gave it to the Phœnicians, who passed it on to the Greeks.

A work *On the Jews* was excerpted by the Greek historian Alexander Polyhistor and attributed to Eupolemus. Polyhistor's excerpts were used by Eusebius in *Praeparatio Evangelica*. This Eupolemus is not, though, the Jewish writer, Eupolemus, but an earlier Samaritan, so called Pseudo-Eupolemus. Pseudo-Eupolemus combined Greek tradition and Babylonian mythology with biblical narrative to yield a history of the Jews, now lost except for two fragments consisting of sixteen verses. It was written between 200 and 150 BC, and speaks of Mount Gerizim as "the mountain of the Most High", betraying its authorship. In these fragments, Abraham is the Jewish Orpheus, the father of the world's science. After the deluge, he built the tower of Babel, emigrated

from Chaldaea to Phœnicia to teach the Phœnicians, helping them in war. Famine drove him to Egypt, where he taught the priests of Heliopolis. Meanwhile, Enoch received astrology from the angels.

More evidence is the work of Artapanus who wrote about 50 BC, only a century before the Christians decided themselves to add their own books to the Jewish canon. Artapanus was an Egyptian Jew with a Persian name, known to us only through excerpts in the Church Fathers, but apparently keen on Egyptian and Greek culture. Moses is Musæus, the teacher of Orpheus, called Hermes, and superior in all things to his pupil. The Jews were called Hermioth before Abraham called them Hebrews!

His work, *On the Jews*, knew of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph but still emphasised Moses. The prominence of Egyptian references show the author was an Egyptian, but Artapanus glorified the Jewish people by elaborating even on the bible! There was even a tradition that Moses *did* enter the Promised Land. Perhaps that was the work of Artapanus. He makes the Egyptians indebted to the Jews for everything they knew. Abraham taught astrology to the Pharaoh Pharethothes. Jacob and his sons found the sanctuaries at Athos and Heliopolis. Joseph showed the Egyptians how to cultivate. Moses became the greatest benefactor of Egypt, founded the Egyptian religion, directing each of the 36 provinces to honour God, and introduced circumcision. He prescribed the consecration of the Ibis and of the Apis bull. Moses taught the Egyptians hieroglyphics! Moses was himself deified.

Aristobulus was a Hellenized Jew of Alexandria in Egypt, living about 160 BC, and might be the same Aristobulus as he to whom the letter in *2 Maccabees* (*2 Macc*1:10) was addressed. There, he is of the family of anointed priests and is the teacher of Ptolemy the king—presumably Philometer VI (181-145 BC). A fragment of a paraphrase and commentary on the *Pentateuch*, for a Pagan readership and dedicated to Ptolemy Philometor, has been preserved by Clement of Alexandria, and by Eusebius.

Aristobulus says the *Pentateuch* had been put into Greek so long before the Greek translation of the *Pentateuch* made under Ptolemy Philadelphus that even Homer and Hesiod were indebted to Moses. Clement confirmed he aimed to prove that all the Greek philosophers and many Greek poets, as well as Aristotle, took from the law of Moses—the *Pentateuch* and the prophets—and so Greek culture was entirely derived from the *Old Testament*. The whole system of Aristotle could, he thought, be found in the bible, and philosophers as prominent as Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato all copied Moses. Later Jewish Hellenists—notably Philo—accepted that Moses was the father of Greek philosophy and culture.

That ancient Greek philosophy had no detectable sign that it had ever heard of Moses did not deter Aristobulus. Typically, he invented the historical evidence, making spurious citations from Hesiod, Homer, Linus, and especially from Orpheus, even though Musæus and Orpheus are mythical! In fact, these citations themselves are forged, and transparently by someone Jewish. If the forger was Aristobulus, then the whole work is dubious. Moreover, since he particularly drew upon Hellenized Jewish works like *Proverbs*, *Ben Sira*, and the *Wisdom of Solomon*, Greek influence was clear, but, on the familiar conviction that the Jewish scriptures are terribly ancient, he put the cart before the horse. The old cons are the best ones! What is interesting is that one of the fragments discusses the Jewish calendar. Aristobulus established that the Passover always falls immediately after the vernal equinox.

Hellenistic Judaism and Christianity also used the *Sibylline Oracles*, first written about 160 BC, in Egypt, but

easily added to, various copies being accessible for adaptation for religious propaganda. The forgers recast the classical theogony in a Jewish *Old Testament* mould—Noah becomes Uranos, Shem Saturn, Ham Titan, and Japheth Japetus. The ancient oracles—of the Erythraean predicting the fall of Troy, and of the Sibyl of Cumae that Tarquinius Superbus deposited in the Capitol when Rome was new—became propaganda for the Jewish God. The earliest sentences, besides a few Pagan oracles, are Jewish in form, while most of the later ones are Christian. The dates of these forgeries are first and second century AD. Diodorus of Sicily (Siculus), writing in the first century BC, mentions the expulsion of foreigners from Egypt, including Danaus and Cadmus who went to Greece(!), and Moses who went to Judaea.

Certainly, the Moses legend was elaborated late, then started growing and suppressing the Babylonian tradition. This tendency left unmolested by developments like Christianity would have probably ended with the stories of the Patriarchs suppressed, and so too the return from Babylon. By around 100 AD, Justus of Tiberias was writing a history of the Jews beginning with Moses. The legends of Abraham and the origin of the Jews in Ur of the Chaldees, Babylonia, had been suppressed by the Alexandrines. Tacitus also refers briefly to the origins of the Jews as being Egypt, the Jews having been evicted by the Pharaoh, Bocchoris, on the instructions of the oracle of Amon, were led by Moses in a six day march. Arriving in a thinly populated land on the seventh day, they expelled the locals and founded a temple and a city.

The propaganda of the Ptolemies, whose aim was the same as the policy of the earlier Persians, but in reverse, so to speak—to gain the favour of the Jews of Jerusalem—evidently became the tradition in the Mediterranean. Egypt under the Ptolemies wanted Judah as a buffer against their rivals the Seleucid Greeks of Syria, and so set about favouring the Jerusalem temple and priesthood, helping them to revise their holy books to suit Egyptian geopolitics. Manetho, Chaeromon and Apion all call Moses an Egyptian priest, Josephus says. It is hard for believers nowadays, conditioned by a peculiar reverence for the Jewish scriptures, to accept that they evolved as a consequence of ancient politics.

Other Jewish works not included in the biblical canon are no more help. None are older. Stephen C Meyers reckons the oldest non-biblical Jewish chronicle is *Seder Olam Rabbah* or *Book of the Order of the World*, written by Jose Ben Halafta who died about 160 AD, but edited in the eighth century AD. *Jubilees* (c 100 BC) is non-canonical and has the novelty of giving a history of the Jews dated in Jubilees, periods of 49 years. Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, a scriptural history from Adam to David, is dated in the first half of the first century AD. The *Testament of Moses*, a dying testament by Moses to Joshua, dates in the first century AD.

## **Exodus a Late Addition to the Jewish Scriptures**

The Essenes were still compiling, revising and composing psalms, at least until the first century BC and probably until they were dispersed after the Jewish War, and the exploits of some of the Hasmonaeans were written into the stories of Moses and David, most obviously the story of Phinehas.

*The Genesis Apocryphon* of the Dead Sea scrolls, relates Abraham's journey to Egypt, naming the Pharaoh as "Pharaoh Zoan, the king of Egypt". Zoan is a place not the name of a Pharaoh, once considered the same place as Avaris, Raamses, and Tanis. The Pharaoh lived at Zoan, confirmation for biblicists that the Hyksos were the Jews, because the Hyksos had their capital at Avaris.

Now, Tanis (cognate with Zoan) was unimportant until it became the residence of the Pharaohs in the twenty-first and twenty-third Dynasties, 1070-946 and 828-715 BC. Thereafter, Sais became the main Egyptian city. So many monuments were found at Tanis inscribed with the name Rameses, it was thought that Tanis was the store-city of Rameses mentioned in *Exodus* 1:11. Then these monuments were found to have been moved to Tanis from Qantir or Tell ed-Dab'a, some fifteen miles south on the Pelusiac Branch of the Nile, the proper site of the Hyksos capital of Avaris. Tanis or Zoan was therefore not Avaris or Raamses and could have had nothing to do with Moses!

Significantly, Zoan (later, San al-Hagar) was again an important political and commercial center during the Ptolemaic period from 300 BC—and remained so until the sixth century AD. *Numbers* 13:22 states parenthetically that Hebron was built seven years before Zoan, an apparently pointless remark, but the name “Talmi” (Ptolemy) appears in the same verse, crying out the period when it was written. The authors of *Isaiah* and *Ezekiel* (*Isa* 19:11,13; *Ezek* 30:14) speak of it. It implies that *Numbers* and these prophetic works were written in the Ptolemaic period by people who knew Egypt at the time.

Even in the bible, considering that Moses is the Jewish lawgiver, he is rarely mentioned in the Jewish scriptures outside of *Exodus*. The founder of any religion ought to be frequently and multiply mentioned, as Christ is in the *New Testament*. Few texts of the bible outside the *Torah* mention Moses, surely a remarkable and inexplicable fact if Moses was as important to Jewish identity as he seems to be, and was as early in their history as they claim. Moses appears in 40 passages of *Exodus*, 16 of *Numbers*, 6 of *Deuteronomy*, 6 of *Joshua*, 5 of *Psalms*. Elsewhere the “law of Moses” appears occasionally but Moses himself is never mentioned more than twice (*Leviticus*, *1 Chronicles*). In the prophets, Moses is only mentioned in *Micah* 6:4, *Isaiah* 63:11-12 and *Jeremiah* 15:1.

All this cries out that *Exodus* was a late addition to the collection of biblical books, and that the prophets certainly knew nothing about the amazing founder of the Jewish race and religion. The psalms in which Moses appears are all Persian period, and the other citations are recognized as post-“exilic” editorial insertions. The reason is that only after the “exile” was the figure of Moses invented.

Only with the Babylonian exile did the figure of Moses acquire the importance that the Jewish tradition attributes to it.

J Alberto Soggin

## **A Parable of the Return from Exile**

Soggin accurately notes that the Moses myth is also a parable of the “return” from “exile” in Babylon. Moses brings the true Israel from a foreign oppression into a home provided by God as His theocracy despite the opposition of the false Israel who prefer to worship idols. Moses is Ezra, the last and greatest of the “returners”. Moses found refuge in Midian as the son-in-law of the priest of Midian. Midian seems to be biblical code for the Medes (and Persians). It was while he was a shepherd in Midian that he saw the burning bush. The Zoroastrian religion venerated fire which was also their name for truth.

The Christian librarian, Julius Africanus, born about 200 AD, and a pupil of Heraclas in Alexandria, declares there is no certain history before the first Olympiad (776 BC). It is an honest enough statement but he then goes



on to establish the date of Moses, even though it is long before the first Olympiad! Plainly enough, even for the Christian Fathers, concepts in *Exodus*, (19:1ff) like a “kingdom of priests” and a “holy nation” as alternatives to a corrupt monarchy, cannot have been written by Moses who knew nothing about monarchy because he died before the Promised Land was ever entered, let alone run as a kingdom. They were written by priests sent from Persia to do just as they said.

Professor Sarna wants us to believe that no biblical writer could have had any reason to invent the bondage in Egypt and the Exodus, and would have written down a proper historical account if it differed from the one in the bible. He quotes Bright who wrote a well known “history” of Israel:

It is not the sort of tradition any people would invent! Here is no heroic epic of migration but the recollection shameful servitude from which only the power of God brought deliverance.

John Bright

This defence is nonsense. The British still celebrate a shameful defeat by the Nazi tank brigades in WWII because the defeat was ameliorated by the evacuation from Dunkirk’s beaches in small boats of a substantial part of the BEF. There is no way of seeing it as other than a disastrous defeat but the British succeed in seeing it as a victory. Without it, and demoralized, the war might have been lost. The Romans equally note the tragedy of the defeated Aeneas fleeing the flames of Troy, carrying his elderly father on his back and holding his young son by the hand, into exile in Italy where his dynasty becomes the Alban kings, scions of whom, Romulus and Remus, found their city. Bright, anyway, assumes that the Jews wrote the story of Moses themselves. They did not.

Professor Sarna also puts the same argument in his own words:

We are at a loss to explain the necessity of fabricating an uncomfortable and disreputable account of Israel’s national origins, nor can we conceive how such a falsity could so persuade the national psyche as to eliminate all other traditions and historical memories, let alone become the dominant and controlling theme in the national religion.

Sarna is not a professor for nothing, but whatever it is, it is not for scientific objectivity. He steadfastly puts his telescope to his blind eye! Let us put it up to his good eye.

The account was fabricated to justify the imposition on Israel of the Persian religion. It is uncomfortable and disreputable because it seeks to depict the polytheistic Israelites that remained in Judah as apostates from the true God, Yehouah, a mirror image of the Persian God, Ahuramazda. The story shows the benefits of acceptance of this god and the horrors of refusing to accept him, or of apostatizing, having initially accepted him.

It succeeded in eliminating earlier traditions only with difficulty, but after about four generations and the construction of a thoroughly mythical history, Jews not only had accepted it as the controlling theme in the national religion, they jealously guarded it as proof that God had chosen them as His elect. By 300 BC, the Greeks had defeated and replaced Persia as the ruling culture, had destroyed the Persian holy books and priesthood, and the remaining Persian tradition was left in the hands of the Jews, now convinced that the religion

they had had imposed on them was their own, and the mythology that had been used to justify it was true history. In the second century BC, the Jewish holy books were in turn largely destroyed in the war between the Maccabees and the Greeks. Only the success of the Maccabees allowed them to be restored from what fragments remained, the memories of the priests and the imagination of the Hasmonaeans seeking to justify their newly established kingdom. They were largely re-written or newly written. From this period the religion factionalized and then spun off Christianity and itself was consciously modified into Rabbinism.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?**  
**The Hebrews: People of Abarnahara**

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## **Phoenicians**

The identity of the Israelites and the Canaanites is falsified in the scriptures, doubtless to justify the biblicists in painting the Israelites as worshippers of the True God and the Canaanites as monstrous idolaters to be suppressed. They are the same race as the Jews, Semites, but *Genesis* makes them sons of Ham.

Phœnicians call themselves Canaanites, and still called themselves Canaanites when they lived in their colonies such as Carthage in north Africa (Tunisia), as S Augustine who lived there confirms even in the fifth century AD. The Greeks and Romans called them “Phoinikes”. The words Phœnician and Canaanite both refer to the red cloth that these people were world famous for producing using the dye from a marine snail. Phœnician is from the Greek word for it, and Canaanite is their own word for it, named in the Nuzi texts as “kinahhu”.

Phœnicia was in contact with Eighteenth dynasty Egypt at a time (1570-1300 BC, conventionally) when the Canaanites lived in the remainder of the Levant from the Orantes to the Egyptian border. They wrote to the Egyptian ministries letters on clay tablets in Babylonian cuneiform. The fourteenth century BC correspondence found at Amarna is also on clay tablets. Abimilki of Tyre, Ribaddi of Byblos and Zimridi of Sidon, all wrote to their overlords in Egypt pledging allegiance or begging for help against insurgents and rebels. Akhnaton was too busy with his religious reforms but the next dynasty, the Nineteenth did help, under Rameses II.

Even as far back as the fourth millennium, the peoples of the ancient Near East were thoroughly mixed from the successive waves of settlers coming from every direction. The Canaanites had settled in Syria by about 2000 BC, and Canaanite names appeared in Sumerian third dynasty Ur soon after 2000 BC. Canaanites seem to have been employed by Sumerians as soldiers and workers. The locals called them “Amurru” meaning “Westerners”. Scholars thought they were a different race and called them Amorites. They were wrong. Amorites were similar people to the Phœnicians, simply spreading out seeking opportunities for employment in the higher civilisations. Some went to Egypt. About the middle of the second millennium, a new wave of Canaanites entered the Levant and became the Phœnicians.

About the same time the Hurrians were arriving from the east, and conquered much of the region at one time or another, only Babylon resisting them. They were a substantial proportion of the Hittite kingdom, and were the same or a related race to the Indo-European Mitannians who arrived about 1500 BC, and eventually set up their own kingdom. Above all, they seemed to have found a good base in Urartu in the second millennium, but signs of a Urartian state only exists after about 900 BC.

It seems to have been the admixture of the Sea Peoples, arriving about 1200 BC, with the Aramaeans of the northern coast of the Levant that led to the coastal people turning to the sea for trade and exploration, and their separation in history from the land locked Aramaeans that we now call Canaanites to distinguish them from the Phœnicians. They settled along the coast, in city states built on islands or rocky promontories that offered natural

harbours.

The Phœnicians that emerged from this blend developed a widespread sea trade, flourishing in the second quarter of the first millennium BC and staying important into the Persian period when for 200 years they provided the Persians with a Mediterranean fleet. Their cities, Byblos, Tyre, Sidon and Arqad were like the Hanseatic League or the Cinque ports of later times, dominating trade and becoming fabulously wealthy. They traded throughout the Mediterranean and beyond into the Atlantic—with Cyprus, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, Spain, North Africa, Egypt and even India. The biblical association of Solomon with Hiram of Tyre was to obtain reflected glory, but there was no basis for such wealth in Jerusalem, a landlocked city on top of a mountain, miles from any caravan routes.

Ashurnasipal (B 76 British Museum) took tribute from the Phœnician cities in 876 BC, and Shalmaneser did the same, as several monuments including the Black Obilisk testify. Jehu the son of Omri appears in the Black Obilisk too. Hiram III of Tyre and Sidon paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser in 741 BC. Luli follows him and is mentioned by Shalmaneser V as the king of both Phœnician cities. Luli reigned about 30 years and is mentioned also in the annals of Sargon II and Sennacherib. He was unsuccessfully seiged in Tyre and made alliances with Egypt and with Judah before he was made to flee to Cyprus.

Phœnicia ended with the fall of Tyre to the Babylonian king Nebuchandnezzar in 573 BC. They were then subject to the Persians when the kings of the cities were replaced by councils of elders, and at Tyre magistrates (judges!) took executive roles. A senate and general assembly also existed. The magistrates had power through their wealth not through heredity. In 332 BC, Alexander the Great sieged and subdued Tyre, and the Phœnicians joined the Hellenistic world. Syrian traders who were likely Phœnicians, stayed prominent for hundreds more years, though the cities never regained any independence.

## Hebrew Script

It is to the Phœnicians that we owe our alphabet. According to Wolfram Von Soden (*The Ancient Orient*), alphabets all derive from a single initial one, the earliest sure form of which is the Phœnician one. A cuneiform alphabet was used at Ugarit, and the Phœnician letters must have been adopted later than then. Writing was vital to trading people and they developed their script—often called, for no good reason, old Hebrew—from Egyptian hieratic script, passed it to the Greeks and from them, it came to us. The Greeks took up Phœnician script in time for Homer and Hesiod to be written down in it. The archaic Greek alphabet was derived from a proto-Canaanite script about 1050 BC when the proto-Canaanite became Phœnician. This chronology is compatible with Herodotus's claim that the alphabet was brought to Greece by Phœnician colonists. Writing in the Phœnician alphabet appeared in Syria-Palestine around 1200 BC, and these letters appeared on the sarcophagus of Ahiiram of Byblos, dated about 1000 BC. The consonants were probably originally syllables with the indistinct vowel “uh”. Otherwise vowels were omitted.

The Canaanite language is what is now called Hebrew, because it was the language of the people of the Persian province of Abarnahara. The script of the Jewish scriptures was Aramaic script, quite a different way of writing, although the language was still Hebrew. After 900, the Aramaeans began to use “w”, “y” and “h” for the long vowels “u”, “e” and “a”, the first use of vowels, introduced fully by the Greeks. Proto-Canaanite, as suggested by Ugaritic, had 28 letters apparently meant to correspond with the days of the month. Archaic Greek kept 27

of the original letters, though seven of them were reallocated as vowels. The Phœnicians reduced the letters to 22. Early in the first millennium BC, under influence of the Phœnician alphabet, the Greeks reorganized their alphabet and took the Phœnician names of those 22 letters, and their order, putting non-Phœnician letters at the end. Martin Bernal writes:

This fits well with the historical and archeological evidence for close contact between the Levant and the Aegean in this period.

About 800 BC, varieties of Phœnician are called—by scholars more influenced by the bible than scholars ought to be—early Hebrew. About 700 BC, early Aramaic script derived from Phœnician. About 650 BC, Latin derived from Greek. About 200 BC, Square Hebrew (or Jewish) derived from Aramaic. Diringier says the distinctive Palestinian Jewish type of script, the Square Hebrew script, can only be traced from the second and the first centuries BC.

One of the distinctive differences between the Phœnician early Hebrew, and the Aramaic Square Hebrew, is the presence for some characters of a dual form in the final letter. W F Albright says Jewish script became standardized just before the Christian era, but the dual forms found in the Square Hebrew style go back to the period before the various offshoots of the Aramaic script assumed their distinctive features, such as in some third-century BC cursive documents in Egypt, in Nabataean inscriptions, and in the earliest Square Hebrew inscriptions and other documents. Only during the second century AD did the present Square Hebrew script, become more or less fixed, and it was only in this period did the consistent Massoretic tradition become established.

Regarding numerals, Georges Ifrah says that Greek ones go back to before the end of the fourth century BC, appearing in papyri in 311 BC and on coins in 266 BC. The oldest examples of the Jewish system go back only to the beginning of the first century BC or, at most, to the last few years of the second century, the oldest example being a coin dated to 103 BC. Before then the people of Palestine used Egyptian hieratic before the Persian period, and then Assyro-Babylonian sexagesimal.

This brief review suggests that written and spoken Hebrew before the Persian period (“the exile”) was Phœnician and, after it, when Aramaic script was adopted by the Persian Chancellery, the Aramaic script was introduced for expressing Hebrew too. Eventually it was seen as the Jewish script. The only numbering system was the Babylonian system used in Persia until the Greek type of system was adopted in Hellenistic times.

## **Canaanites**

The Canaanites north of the Phœnician coastal strip and east of it in the Orantes valley and the plain that stretched to the Euphrates were culturally indistinguishable from those to the south and the supposedly different people, the Israelites. All took influences from elsewhere, notably the greater civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and formed them into their own amalgam.

Phœnician towns of any size were walled and their water supplies were based on cisterns. An impermeable lime plaster was invented at the start of the Iron Age and was used thereafter by all Canaanites to line cisterns. The same treatment is widespread in the Palestinian hill country.

Phœnicians liked colour and wore multi-coloured garments. Homer, writing about 700, mentioned the many-coloured (polychrome) clothes worn by the Sidonians. Joseph's coat of many colours sounds Phœnician, but Joseph was about 600 years too early, if biblical dating is accepted, and there is no good reason why he only should have had such a coat since they were always fashionable—except to create a story. Egyptians preferred white.

The supposed influx of Canaanites under Joshua made no noticeable difference to the Canaanite culture of the south as even Yigael Yadin, sometime Israeli general and archaeologist, has shown from his excavations at Hazor. What did make a difference throughout the Levant in the first millennium was the change to Aramaic, a change encouraged by the Persians who adopted it to replace Elamite as the official language of the chancellery. Then Greek replaced Aramaic after the conquest of Persia by Alexander.

Greeks adopted coinage from the Lydians in the sixth century BC, but the Phœnicians seemed to prefer bartering for a longer time. The Persians under Darius took to coinage about the end of the sixth century, so the Phœnicians, by then part of the Persian empire, had the chance of introducing it, but the Persians mainly used their “darics” and “sigloi” for trading in Anatolia with the Greeks and Lydians, sticking to bartering by weighing elsewhere. Persian coinage got more used after the Persian wars in the fifth century when the Persians employed more Greek soldiers and merchants. This was the time when Tyre struck its first coins, and Sidon, Aredus and Byblos followed in the next few decades.

In the Persian period at least, the whole of the coastal plain of the Levant, including the coastal regions of David's supposed former kingdom, as far south as Askelon in Philistia, was ruled from Phœnicia, not from Yehud. On a funerary inscription of the Sidonian king, Eshmunezer II who reigned in the mid fifth century BC (*Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum, Pars Prima: Inscriptiones Phœnias Continens I* (Paris 1881), cited in *Second Temple Studies II* Sheffield Academic Press), the king says the Persians allowed the Sidonian king to rule:

Dor and Joppa, the mighty lands of Dagon, which are in the plains of Sharon, in accordance with the important deeds that I did. And we added them to the borders of the country, so that they would belong to Sidon forever (trans F Rozenenthal, ANET 662).

This was at the time the Persians were setting up temple state of Yehud. If the Phœnicians were using their own script at this time and not Aramaic script, then the religious books of the Jews would have been written in the script of the local administration—Phœnician = Hebrew script, the script of the province of Abarnahara. Shortly afterwards, the Persians made Aramaic the official language of diplomacy and Aramaic script will have replaced Hebrew script, but evidently not the actual language of the holy books.

The Phœnicians made human sacrifices of children up to the age of adulthood (13 years) in their topheth or sacrificial temples, as the Israelites also did according to the bible, probably until the arrival of the Persians. A description of the topheth temple in the valley of Hinnom (Gehenna), Jerusalem, appears in the scriptures:

And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech.



Children were sacrificed to “Molech”, the name of a god akin to Melkart, meaning the King, presumably of the city of Jerusalem. The cremated bones of the sacrificed children were put in urns and placed in the courtyard of the topheth, where they were treated with solemn reverence. Excavations show that sometimes birds or lambs were substituted. Josiah is supposed to have stopped all such primitive and uncultured practices a hundred years before the country was colonized by the “returners” from Persia, but no such religious change of consciousness could have made any sense before the Persian conquest. The name Josiah gives away the fact that the king is a saviour—it is a cognate of Joshua. Saviours were imposed by conquerors like the Assyrians and the Persians.

## **Canaanite Religion**

Though the Phœnicians were influenced by their powerful neighbours, Egypt and Babylonia, they stuck largely to their own gods and ritual, taking them into their colonies, where however, they sometimes had different names although they were recognizably the same gods from their characteristics.

Each locality had a deity known by the general name of Baal, whose power was limited to the place in which he was worshipped. In Roman times, there were in Africa and Spain many dedications to the “Genius municipii.” As most of the places where these inscriptions have been found had formerly been settlements of the Phœnicians, the worship of the local Baal of the Phœnicians seems to have continued under the Roman name of “Genius municipii.”

Claude F A Schaeffer’s work at Ugarit, on the northern coast, revealed a civilization of the thirteenth century BC closely similar to that in Palestine. The Ras Shamra tablets found there describe a complicated Canaanite mythology written in an alphabetic cuneiform that the Phœnicians replaced by an alphabet suitable for writing on parchment rather than clay, inventing the western alphabet.

El was a bull and sun god who lived in the fields of El in the West. His wife was Asherat Yahm, “Our Lady of the Sea”, a mother goddess, and Baal was the god of the mountains, the storm and the rain, a horned god with a thunderbolt. Baal was also called Aliyan meaning the mighty or the victorious, and in Byblos Asherat was Baalat, “Our Lady.” The temple to Baal at Ugarit and the one nearby to Dagon both consisted of an inner sanctum and an outer one opening on to a courtyard with an altar, just like the description of the Jerusalem temple. Dagon was a corn god, not a merman. The god of Sidon was Eshmun, identified by the Greeks with Asklepios (Aesculepius), the healing god whose characteristics and titles were many of those Christians later adapted to Christ. In the Ugaritic texts, Yahm is an alternative name for Yehouah, a sea god whose consort was also Asherat. Baal and Yahm are in conflict and El urges Yahm to drive Baal out. It seems the antagonism between Baal and Yehouah was an ancient feature of Canaanite religion.

The myth of Baal is that he struggles with Mot, a death god representing the heat of the summer, is defeated and dies because he is described as descending into the earth to the abode of the dead. His sister-wife, Anat, is distraught at his disappearance and, lovelorn, she seeks everywhere for him. Finding him among the dead she retrieves his body, and takes it to the heights of Saphon where she buries him with proper ritual. Then full of fury she seeks out Mot and butchers him with a sickle, winnowing the pieces and sowing them into the fields.

With Mot dead, Baal returns to life and sits on Mot's throne, life ascendant over death for a season, allowing vegetation to grow again.

The Anat and Baal fertility myth was echoed throughout the ancient Near East as Venus and Adonis, Isis and Osiris, Ishtar and Tammuz, and as Astarte and Esmmun at Sidon. The Phœnician goddess was Astarte, the Israelite Ashtoreth, known in Carthage as Tanit, though the appearance of the word might suggest Anat as the source. "Astart" appears often as part of a girl's name but Tanit never does. Perhaps Astarte and Anat had merged their characteristics and Tanit had emerged as a compound name, which however was only ever seen as the goddess's nickname. Astarte had acquired the characteristics of a Great Mother, so might well have taken on Anat's too, and indeed must have in Sidon at least. Tanit was little known in the east but the goddess is often depicted as a triangle or cone shape, and such cones of the third century BC with the triangular image of Tanit, weights carrying her image and Greek styled lamps with it have been found at Beit Jibrin in southern Palestine.

The High God, El, simply means God, and the word for gods which, in the scriptures, appears most often for God is "elohim" which means "the gods!" Baal means "Lord" and Baalat means "Lady." Adon also means "Lord" and Adoni My Lord. Milk means "king." A stele from Byblos is dedicated to Yahawmilk. It shows a cloaked and bearded man making an offering to Hathor, the Egyptian goddess. Yahawmilk means "Yehouah is king."

The god of Tyre was "ha Melkart" which simply means "the king of the city", and he is also given the title Baal so that he is "Baal Melkart." A large effigy of him was solemnly burned every year. Josephus speaks of a festival at Tyre called the "Awakening of Hercules." Melkart was the equivalent of Hercules who immolated himself on a funeral pyre, and ascended in a cloud to heaven. From Tyre the Phœnicians, the great colonists and navigators, took Melkart over the seas to their colonies like Carthage, where it is found in Carthaginian names like Hamilcar. Carthage sent special envoys to the celebration in the mother-city every year. As far away on the coast of Spain, at Gades (Cadiz), which the Phœnicians founded, a great effigy of Melkart was fired annually, and the god would rise. Even in Tarsus of Cilicia, where Paul lived, there was a similar annual celebration.

The menorah, the seven branched candlestick, often considered an exclusively Jewish symbol, has been found in a distinctive style at Carthage. Seven lamps, containers or candlesticks are arranged along a branch about a foot long. To the front is a head rather like the goddess Hathor and, in front of that, the head of a long horned bull.

## **Phœnician Colonies**

The mistaken belief that Solomon was a real and powerful king of the tenth century BC who traded with Tartessos—supposedly the biblical Tarshish—in Spain has misled everyone. Besides their colonies and trading posts in the Mediterranean, Strabo says the Phœnicians founded colonies outside the straits of Gibraltar just after the Trojan War, but the oldest ones seem to be about the eighth century. The explanation is that the Trojan War has been wrongly dated 400 years too early, so Strabo is not necessarily exaggerating. It is simply that the Trojan War was not as ancient as modern scholars have thought. Neither Phœnicians nor Greeks had arrived in Spain at 1200 BC or even 1000 BC to suit Solomon, and Tartessos was never a mighty kingdom in the west. The north African Phœnician city of Carthage must have been founded earlier and it was founded about 800 BC, remaining strong until ploughed with salt by the Romans after the third Punic War in 146 BC. It was not rebuilt

for a hundred years.

Herodotus, in book 1 of his *Histories*, says that Tartessos was discovered by the Phocaeans, sailing in pentaconters, fifty oared longships that replaced the older round, square-rigged ships, with just a few oars used mainly for manoeuvring in port, used before. Late eighth century Attic and Corinthian vases show ships with twenty oars on either side, either an artistic convention for a pentaconter or a precursor of it. So, they must have been first introduced around 700 BC. The Phocaeans must then have discovered Tartessos in the first part of the seventh century.

When the Persians invaded Asia Minor, in the sixth century, the Phocaeans uprooted their whole city and emigrated to Corsica, which they must already have discovered on their way to Tartessos. Their explorers must have sailed from Corsica to Sardinia, then across to the Balearic Islands and thus discovered Spain and the Pillars of Hercules. Syracuse in Sicily was established in about 730 BC, so the Greeks were undoubtedly active in the western Mediterranean about this time.

Elsewhere, in *Histories* (Book IV), Herodotus tells a different story about the discovery of Tartessos. A ship captained by a mariner from Samos was blown off course by a gale while it was passing from Crete to Egypt. He found at Tartessos what he called an untouched virgin market, emphasizing that this Samian was the discoverer of the place. He brought back 60 talents of silver of which 6 talents were dedicated to the Goddess Hera according to the normal practice that good fortune or a windfall gain should merit an offering to a favoured deity of a tenth. The offering was to purchase a large Argive cauldron decorated with sphinxes and supported by massive kneeling men. This type of cauldron was popular in the seventh century but soon went out of fashion tending to confirm the date of the story.

That any ship should have been blown so far off course is impossible. It only becomes possible if the ship was already in the western Mediterranean, so it sounds like an early cover story to hide the fact that the captain already found it worthwhile trading in the west. Samos and Phocaea were both in the Ionian league and Herodotus might not have known which was really responsible for the discovery, and gave two stories to hedge his bets. Herodotus had lived a long time in Samos and had plenty of time to hear these stories and see offerings like the giant bowl dedicated to Hera, examples of which have been found in several Greek sanctuaries, in the tomb of king Midas, and even in Spain itself.

Herodotus could perhaps be expected to puff the Greeks at the expense of the Phœnicians, so which of them actually went into the Atlantic first is not so certain. Modern discoveries of Phœnician colonies in Spain favour the Phœnician claim, and certainly the Phœnicians eventually sealed the Straits of Gibraltar to prevent their rivals from passing through them.

In the middle of the seventh century BC, Majorca was under Greek influence and Ibiza was controlled by the Phœnicians, so both Greeks and Phœnicians seem to have arrived in Spain at about the same time. Phœnician graves have been excavated on Ibiza, and many excellent contemporary Greek figurines have been found on Majorca. The graves on Ibiza suggest that a Punic colony existed there, while the Greeks had only a trading post on Majorca. In the last few years an astonishing number of finds of Phœnician trading posts have been found in Portugal, and a cave shrine to Melkart has been investigated at the foot of the Rock of Gibraltar.

The Phœnicians had an influence on the initial growth of Rome. They had a trading colony with a temple to Melkart in the Forum Boarum. There was another Phœnician settlement at Pyrgi in Etruria, not far off, only twenty miles north. In the first Roman treaty with Carthage, the Carthaginians were content to leave Rome in control in central Italy, presumably content that the Phœnician presence was sufficient safeguard.

The Phœnician colonies were left speaking Phœnician (Punic) when the parent country had lost it through multiple conquests. Augustine confirms that the people of north Africa still spoke Punic in his own time, though it is unlikely to have been written. In *Acts* the inhabitants of Malta were called “barbaroi” meaning that they did not speak a civilized tongue—Latin or Greek. It must have been Punic—Hebrew!—the same language, allowing for regional variation (dialect) as the Jewish scriptures and the Moabite stone, the scripts being the same (not modern Hebrew script which is Aramaic) but more like Greek. Evidently Paul, the Pharisee did not recognize it!

## Tarshish

Herodotus says the Phocaeans knew the ruler of Tartessos as Arganthonios, evidently a title rather than a name. Herodotus understood him to have been a man who lived to the age of 120, and whom the Phocaeans dealt with for 80 years. Supposedly he subsidized a city wall for the Phocaeans to protect themselves against the Medes. The truth might be that the wall was paid for by the lucrative trade in silver that the Phocaeans had with Tartessos at first.

“Argant” is the Celtic word for silver presumably adopted into Latin as argent. Arganthon is a form of name often coined by Greeks especially for mountains. Strabo and Pliny confirm that the source of the Guadalquivir was a mountain called “Mons Argentarius”, or Silver Mountain. Arganthonios is therefore a name or title coined from the name of the mountain and therefore meaning “The One of the Silver Mountain.”

The early sixth century poet, Stesichoros, called Tartessos the “silver-rooted river.” Earlier writers make it a river though later ones make it into a city, except Aristotle who still calls it a river. Pausanias, following Strabo, says the river in the land of the Iberians (Spain) that gives its name to “Tartessian bronze” had two mouths between which was a city. Adolf Shulten spent years trying to find this city but failed. The Celts did not build cities, and the Greeks did not have to understand a “polis” as a built city, but as an inhabited area. That Herodotus calls its leader a king makes it sound important, but “basileus” in Greek did not imply any great power, simply meaning a ruler, so Arganthonios could have been a tribal chief. The city was probably a few villages, perhaps specializing in selling silver from the mines in the hills and so not meant to be permanent in any way and long ago washed away by floods.

Romans called the Guadalquivir the “Baetis”, but Livy says the locals called it the “Tertis.” This must be the local word rendered in Greek as Tartessos and by the Phœnicians in Hebrew as Tarshish. Strabo says that the Baetis rose in the Silver Mountain, so called because of its silver mines, and he adds that “the ancients knew the Baetis under the name Tartessos, and Gades with its neighbouring islands under the name Erytheia.”

Of the two islands in the sheltered bay at the mouth of the river, the Phœnicians chose to fortify the larger one calling it “Gadir”, meaning “Stronghold.” The Romans Latinized this to Gades, and thence it came down to us as Cadiz. The smaller island, Erytheia, was used by Greek merchant adventurers and entered Greek legend as the limit of the West where Geryn kept a herd of cattle that Hercules had to sail west to find. Later the Punic

blockade kept the Greeks out, and the Carthaginians controlled trade beyond the Pillars of Hercules. Despite this Phœnician remains before the fifth century have not been found in Cadiz, though the earlier settlements could have been washed away by flood or more likely dug away when the immense sea walls of the present city were built. A late seventh century Greek bronze helmet was found during dredging in 1938, half a dozen miles only from Erytheia. The type of helmet was soon superseded so its date is certain.

The rivers Odiel and Tinto emerge at the sea at the port of Huelva, where copper is an important resource still (Riotinto Zinc), and where coastal deposits have to be dredged continuously to keep the port open to large ore carriers. Odiel is a strangely Canaanite sounding name for a Spanish river, meaning "God is My Glory." Is this a Punic name? Bronze Celtic swords and daggers are often dredged up in this constant work and among them has been found a late sixth century bronze Greek helmet, one would imagine among the last goods traded from Greece before the gates were slammed by the Phœnicians' fortress at Cadiz. No later Greek objects have been found but Phœnician objects become more common.

A Phœnician cemetery at Cerro de San Cristobel in Spain yielded alabaster jars with cartouches of Osorkon II (870-847 BC) and Takelothis (847-823 BC), and imitation cartouches including one of Soshenq II (847 BC). Despite the presence of these apparently ninth century vessels, the cemetery is not older than 700, judging from artefacts of Greek style. Interestingly, a Phœnician mining settlement at Riotinto is at a place called "Solomon's Hill." This will be the Phœnician god, Shalmi, probably the original Solomon, anyway.

It seems that while the Phœnicians in the Levant were made subjects of the Persians, and the Greeks became absorbed in wars with their Asian enemy and among themselves, the Carthaginians took the chance of cornering the markets in the west. Greek poets romanticized the Pillars of Hercules as the limit of the west because they were unable to pass beyond by the Carthaginians, not for any natural reason, and Pindar knew that Gades was further west. Not until Pytheas was another Greek to pass that way and tell us he did.

## **The Phœnicians in Spain**

Melkart was worshipped in the city of Gades (Cadiz). In Gades there were two temples one to Cronus and one to Melkart. The Greeks identified Melkart with Hercules. The Pillars of Hercules, always considered to have been the headlands on either side of the strait of Gibraltar, were, according to Strabo, quoting the local Iberians and Moors, the twin pillars characteristic of Canaanite temples of the temple of Melkart in Cadiz. Herodotus says the temple of Melkart at Tyre had the two pillars—one of gold and one of silver. The biblical equivalents, Boaz and Jachin in Solomon's temple, not mentioned by Herodotus, were made of bronze.

The god, Hercules Gaditanus, probably Melkart, was popular among the Romans, and his name is often found on coins. Hercules was popular in southern and eastern Spain where twenty inscriptions to him have been found. At Carteia (Rocadillo) and Epora (Montoro) not far from Gades, mention is made on the inscriptions of the "priests of Hercules."

Silius of Italica near Seville in the first century AD described the worship at the temple of Cadiz, which he believed was still practiced in the fashion of the ancient Phœnicians. There were no cult images, the priests were barefoot and wore only a white linen, close fitting tunic and a cap on a shaven head, and they maintained an ever burning fire. Silius was mistaken because these practices clearly derive from the Persian period of

Phœnician history. They are pure Zoroastrianism, but will give a good impression of what happened in the Jerusalem temple. Phœnician priesthoods were hereditary, like the Jerusalem priesthood, and they also habitually wore white, as the Jerusalem priesthood did except for special occasions when a celestially decorated garment was worn.

## **Necho's Circumnavigation of Africa**

Having discovered the outer ocean, conceived of as an ever flowing river surrounding the continents, Greeks and Phœnicians around 600 BC felt that it ought to be possible to sail along it to get from one side of a continent to another. The idea came to the attention of the Egyptian Pharaoh, Necho (610-595 BC), who had tried to open a canal to join the Nile to the Red Sea and apparently had failed. Perhaps he thought it would be easier to sail round Africa! Though he had no idea of the extent southwards of Africa, that is what he decided to try to do, and he commissioned Phœnician sailors to make the attempt.

The journey down the Red Sea to the mysterious places of Punt and Ophir were done regularly, and these will be the truth behind Solomon's trips to Tarshish. Conceivably Punt could have been as far as Zanzibar but perhaps was more likely to have been in what is now Yemen and perhaps Eritrea or Somalia on the opposite coast. To get to Zanzibar would have been quite an adventure in itself but the Arabs did it and the Indians, so perhaps the Egyptians did too. If not, Ophir or Punt in Arabia was a trading station from which the Egyptians purchased rarities and novelties perhaps brought there from places further afield.

They will have thought that Africa was a triangle or segment, and the Egyptians knew the distances south to Somalia where they saw the coast turning to the west, and the Phœnicians knew the journey west to the Pillars of Hercules where the coast turned south and then, they thought east, to join up after a long but tolerable distance for such experienced mariners. Necho's father, Psamtik I, had set up a Greek city specially for trading with the northerners called Naukratis, and it is here where Herodotus heard of the Phœnician admiral's journey, sponsored by Necho. He records that Necho through this sponsorship established that Africa was indeed surrounded by water except where it joined Asia at the tiny isthmus that Necho could not span by canal.

The Phœnician fleet sailed south along the Red Sea to the southern ocean. The total journey took three years, perhaps the source of the Solomon interval between visits of the Tarshish ships, including two half year stoppages to plant and harvest wheat for provisions. In the third year they arrived back at the Nile Delta.

Herodotus, a much better observer than many give him credit for, observed that he did not believe one aspect of the story. This was that, for part of the trip, the westward sailing fleet had the sun on its right hand. Sailing west in the northern hemisphere means the sun is to the port side. Only south of the equator does the sun appear on the starboard. This is a detail that could not have been invented. No one could have conceived of passing over the equator because they did not perceive the world as a sphere but as a disc. The sun was the epitome of reliability and could not have been thought of as behaving so peculiarly. Here was an actual experience considered astonishing enough to remark upon but too astonishing for some to accept.

Circumnavigating Africa in this clockwise direction is fortunately assisted by favourable winds and currents, whereas it is much harder in the opposite direction. The total distance to be covered is about 16,000 miles, and it was done in about 1000 days, needing an average speed of only 16 miles a day. Even allowing for the long



stopovers, the speed would only have to double and remains quite feasible for pentaconters. The first stopover would have been in South Africa and the second on the coast of Morocco.

However, it is hard to believe that the Phœnicians would have needed to do this. Most of the shores of Africa are inhabited, and Homer in the *Odyssey* describes Phœnicians not only as “skilled mariners” but also “crafty” and with “many a trinket.” In other words, they knew the art of bartering, and travelled expecting to do it. Surely they would have used this skill to barter provisions with the Ethiopians.

After another hundred years, according to Herodotus, the Persian king, Xerxes, tried to repeat Necho’s feat. Sataspes, a son of Teispes (Chishpish), possibly the same one as founded the Achaemenids if “son of” can be read as “a descendent of”, seduced the virgin daughter of Megabyxos, himself of noble blood. Punishment was to be crucifixion, but Sataspes’ mother pleaded that the son be allowed to prove himself, so Xerxes told him to circumnavigate Africa for his sin.

Sataspes fitted out a ship in Egypt, but we have no idea whether the crew were Phœnicians or Greeks except that he aimed to go round from the Pillars of Hercules and to find his way back to the Red Sea. Thus, a passage through the Pillars would have been needed and implies that the crew were Phœnician if they were to get Carthaginian authority to pass through the Straits of Gibraltar, as they would have had to in the reign of Xerxes (486-465 BC). His story is that he sailed until his ship would not move in the water, presumably because he faced a strong adverse current, not merely windless conditions because the ship would have been a pentaconter and could have been rowed were that the problem. He reported on seeing small men dressed in palm leaves, presumably pigmies, but returned to Xerxes having failed in his task. Xerxes was not satisfied by this, saying his punishment was to complete the task, so Sataspes was crucified anyway.

## **Hanno of Carthage**

Herodotus gives the impression that after the failure of Sataspes, the next successful attempt was by Carthaginians, but he gives us no more information. A whole book of the *Histories* is missing, being that very one that dealt with the Levant and Mesopotamia, and containing too many home truths for Christian editors to cope with. Perhaps it would have been here, in a discussion of the history of the Phœnicians that we might have discovered about further successful attempts, but in the extant *Histories* nothing more is said about them. Not until the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus did any other king show enough interest in exploration to want to sponsor expeditions.

A Carthaginian failed to circumnavigate Africa just as Sataspes did, but left a record that has come down to us. His adventure, which might have been roughly contemporary with that of Sataspes, is given in a little book called the *Periplous of Hanno*. The tenth century copy we now have is confirmed and corrected by several references by classical authors who seemed to have been impressed by it. Aristotle in the fourth century seemed not to know of it but later Aristotelians did, and thereafter it is mentioned widely in Greek and Roman writings. Pliny notes that Hanno’s commission was to explore Africa when the power of Carthage was at its height, probably after the Persian conquest of Phœnicia but before the Punic Wars began, but he also makes him a contemporary of Himilco who lived about 500 BC.

Many Phœnician goods have been found at Morocco on the Atlantic coast, and there is no reason to doubt that

Phœnician merchants traded as far south as Dakar. An island called Kerne, in the delta of the river Senegal, was the scene of the Phœnicians trading with Ethiopians (Africans) according to Hanno's account. Hanno might have gone well beyond there—to Cameroon.

*The Periplous* begins with an explanation that the account of the voyage was deposited in a sanctuary to Baal (Melkart) and dedicated to the god. It would therefore probably have been seen almost exclusively by Phœnicians. Hanno set out with a large fleet of sixty pentaconters especially to found Phœnician colonies on the Atlantic coast of Africa, which suggests it is after the coast had been surveyed and found suitable for colonizing. About 450 BC seems a reasonable guess. Having done his duty and founded the colonies, he seems to have set off on an adventure further south, probably with just a few ships, not the full fleet of sixty.

The account in the *Periplous* gives distances in days' sailing, a rather indistinct measure. What is more, the descriptions of the coastal visages in Greek are imprecise because Greece is imprecise in its use of certain words. Polis has already been mentioned but "oros" (a mountain) is similar, being a word that can be applied to almost any raised up ground, but tends to mean what seems dramatic rather than objectively big. Thus a steep 200 foot cliff that the ship sails by is not distinguished from a 13,000 feet high mountain in the distance. "Lakes" and "horns" are spoken of meaning apparently "lagoons" and "bays", or estuaries, but with little indication of size.

To get an idea of speed in ancient vessels, the Greek geographer, Scylax, says the 1000 miles from Carthage to the Pillars of Hercules took a week to cover in favourable conditions of continuous sailing. This speed of about 140 miles a day seems astonishingly good, however, and 80 miles a day was probably closer to a typical speed. The current through the Straits of Gibraltar is all against the westerly sailing vessel because the inland seas are evaporating at a rate faster than they can be replenished by rivers flowing into them, leaving a water deficit that has to be made up by an inflow from the Atlantic. Prevailing winds would also be generally against, so time would have to be wasted waiting for good conditions or a few days of heavy rowing against the current might have been needed.

Once the fleet had got well past the Straits, and begun to turn to the southwest to follow the coast, conditions would have improved, the circulation of the ocean current being southwards along the coast. Only a few days out, Hanno founded his first colony at a place he called Thymiaterion, probably Port Lyautry or Mehedia.

Five more colonies were founded and named Carian Fort, Gytte, The Heights, Melitta and Arambys. The Punic word for "fort" can be seen in Mogador and Agadir, so these are possibly two of the bases. He also mentions a place called Soloeis, thought to have been Cape Cantin, described as a "headland covered in trees", though there are none there now. It was common practice to set up a shrine at any new headland being rounded to bring good fortune from the gods, so Hanno set one up to Poseidon (Yahm?) to appease the sea god.

Another problem leads some scholars to view the whole story as a romance—Hanno says he sailed towards the sunrise, only for half a day, but it is not possible here at all. It is hard to imagine a Phœnician admiral getting elementary directions wrong, so one has to suspect that some of the directions might have been deliberately wrong to discourage any rivals. Alternatively, this might be the rounding of a cape further to the south, implying that the tale has been garbled in the telling. A lagoon with elephants and wild animals feeding was probably Wadi Tensift, a large river when in flood in the spring from the thawing of the Atlas snows. Then its coastal

marshes flooded giving the impression of a lagoon. Again there are no large wild animals there now, particularly elephants, all doubtless victims of centuries of Roman “games”, but there probably were then.

From this point on for a thousand miles, the Sahara desert runs into the Atlantic, and there is little of anything onshore let alone anything to attract a merchant adventurer. He found a river called the Lixos populated by friendly nomads pasturing their herds. This must have been the Dra'a, which at one time had a clear mouth but which now is dispersed into irrigation channels before it reaches the sea. The admiral says the explorers spent “some considerable time” with them exploring the interior. The language of these people by the river Dra'a was obviously known to the Carthaginians, probably because they spoke Berber, a language that has little in the way of dialect and must have been well known to the Carthaginian people. Hecataeus confirms that there was a river “Lizus” (Lixos) and a “city of the Libyans” called “Melissa.”

Numbers seem to have gone awry, but on the assumption that a theta has been mistaken for a beta, the proper text can be restored and is confirmed from the classics. This means that Hanno will have sailed the 1000 miles in nine days, a feasible time with the current as it is. The river Chretes is next mentioned and seems certain to be the Senegal river. A base camp was set up on an island called Kerne apparently in the estuary of this large river. Again the river seemed to be in flood, making the season the autumn after the summer rains. The reason is that he loses the river itself, seeming to sail into a large lake, which was probably the flooded plain. Then he found the course of the river once more and found it infested with crocodiles and hippopotamuses, so he turned back to his base camp. The Senegal river is well known for having a swarming population of crocodiles.

A further twelve days of sailing south seemed to bring the explorers to Sierra Leone, which was hilly and wooded, the wood being “odorous sweet and of great variety.” The natives now, Hanno observed were negroes who fled from them and could not be understood by the Lixite interpreters. Two more days on was a great inlet of the sea, possibly the Sherbro river. The Carthaginians were amazed by the fires visible even by night, probably caused by deliberate stubble or grass burning. Mungo Park writing more than 2000 years later (*Travels in the Interior District of Africa*) noted the practice too. Near the end of the journey, Hanno mentions a “heaven high fire greater than the rest” and a “lofty mountain that was called called the Chariot of the Gods.” Many people can only see the huge volcano of Mount Cameroon in this description, but if it is, Hanno's journey times must be even more amiss, because he has not suggested he had enough time to get so far east, and has observed on no features between.

At this point they captured three hairy female apes which their translators said were called gorillas. Gorillas, though are from central Africa, so they must have been mandrills or chimpanzees. They had run out of supplies and so had to return.

## **West Africa**

Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, called Africanus because he conquered Africa, was the Roman general who put paid to Carthage for good in 146 BC. At this time he was friendly with Polybius, a pro-Roman Greek of Megalopolis in Arcadia. Both were together in Gades after the Roman victory and Scipio peculiarly offered Polybius a squadron of the Roman navy to check the Carthaginian colonies on the Moroccan coast. Polybius seems to have done so and tracked Hanno as far as the trading post at Kerne in the estuary of the Senegal.

Nothing more is known, though the Roman indifference to the colonies suggests that they thought they were not worth any bother. It was to be almost another 200 years before they were officially annexed to Rome and then it was done by land, the infantry footslogging around to assert Roman authority. Another Greek called Euthymenes had also checked the African coast in Hanno's wake but other than that he too reached the river full of crocodiles, nothing more is said. A barely known explorer, Midacritus, is mentioned by Pliny as the "first to import lead from the tin land." Britain is presumed but nothing more is known.

## Solomon and Tarshish

The Jewish scriptures refer to "ships of Tarshish" several times.

For the king had at sea a navy of Tarshish with the navy of Hiram. Once in three years came the navy of Tarshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.

(1 Kgs 10:22)

Jehoshaphat made ships of Tarshish to go to Ophir for gold: but they went not, for the ships were broken at Eziongeber.

(1 Kgs 22:48; cf 2 Chr 20:35-37)

Every three years the Tarshish ships returned with ivory, peacocks and so on, items that would not have come from a Spanish town. If Tarshish means a place, it does not mean a place in Spain. It could with almost equal difficulty mean Tarsus in Cilicia, but "Tarshish ships" normally does not mean ships of the navy of Tarshish but simply describes a type of ship. The Tarshish ships that Jehoshaphat made were obviously his own ships. The word also means a precious stone like a topaz, so it might simply mean that they were ships meant to be laden with wealth, or were simply the finest of ships. Tarshish appears in Esther in the bible as the name of a Persian, and Teresh, a similar Persian name, is the name of a eunuch of Xerxes.

The ships going to Tarshish went from Eziongeber at the head of the Red Sea. Bryn Mawr Professor, Rhys Carpenter (*Beyond the Pillars of Hercules*), writing in 1965 assures us that "excavations by Nelson Glueck leave no doubt as to its location or of its importance as a shipping station in biblical times." Dr Carpenter is a classicist and should take no notice of anything that a biblicist like Glueck ever says. Glueck excavated in 1938-40 where he expected to find his bible vindicated, and so it was. The trouble is that it was almost entirely fancy. Besides the seaport, he found King Solomon's mines with "flues", "crucibles" and "slag." All of it was false, but it still resides in Carpenter's book as leaving "no doubt." Glueck was still writing soft articles about it forty years after he did the archaeology, but William Dever tells us in *Lutterworth's Dictionary of the Bible*:

Glueck did not live to publish the site beyond preliminary reports that left most of the data problematic.

How do these "scholars" get away with it for a full lifetime? They root around in the earth scrambling up the strata, make up whatever they like, then do not even bother to publish any of the hard data in respected academic journals, but only impressions in popular articles. Glueck's work is manifestly not only worthless but, like most biblicist "scholarship", is actually harmful and misleading, yet scholars like Carpenter never question the garbage biblicists present as discovery. It is time that scientific scholars moved into this field to clear up the biblicists' mess.

It took Necho's sailors three years to circumnavigate Africa and this might be the allusion in the bible of the three year journey, but to return the same way would double the trip, so it had to mean a one way trip leaving from Eziongeber and arriving back at Tyre, whence the mention of Hiram. However, it must be sheer romance to think that these ships did the journey around Africa regularly. So far as we know, it was a one-off adventure, and, if this is a memory of it, it has been fictionalized to magnify the Jewish kings. None of the references to Tarshish in the scriptures can convincingly be considered a place on the Atlantic coast of Spain. It is much more plausible that Tarshish ships meant ships of Tyre—the type of ships used by the Phœnicians.

Carpenter's own reason led him to doubt certain things about this fleet of Solomon:

1. His people had no experience of the sea.
2. His land grew no timber suitable for ship building.
3. He depended on Phœnicians for his crews, for his timber and doubtless for shipmaking skills.
4. The timber for the ships to be built on the gulf of Aqaba must have been floated down the coast from Lebanon, then transported overland to Eziongeber!

All that there was at Glueck's Eziongeber was a modest fortified building that had been modified over the years. Dating was by pottery, the only certain dates of which were post-Assyrian, down to about the fourth century. There was no evidence of a great seaport and nothing certain that was tenth century. If Solomon or the Phœnicians had a port on the gulf of Aqaba, it was not here! Yet the bible tells us that each three years trip to Ophir brought back 420 talents of gold! Solomon's income from this source alone was 140 talents annually, a huge sum—something like the total yearly taxation of Abarnahara under the Persians. Indeed, it makes more sense to believe that this was the taxation of Abarnahara, collected by Solomon's temple staff and paid on to the Persian treasury.

The mention of peacocks which come from southern India and Ceylon, suggest that Ophir was meant to be India. Is it possible that the Phœnicians did trade with India? Indeed it is, and Greeks too. Eudoxus of Cyzicus is said, in Strabo's *Geography* Book II, to have been a Black Sea Greek who twice made the run down the Red sea to India for the Ptolemies. Note we are talking here of the third century BC not the tenth. Eudoxus was annoyed that the profits that he hoped to make on the trips were all claimed by the Egyptian kings who sponsored the trip, so decided to have a go himself, bypassing Egypt by sailing around Africa. He was shipwrecked but managed to get back to try again, but then he apparently disappeared and was never seen again.

To make the orthodox Red Sea run to India the ship departs in the late summer to catch the wind funnelling down the Red Sea toward the Southern Ocean. Once in the ocean, the ship catches the south west monsoon and the ship is carried quickly across the sea to India, which it should reach by late autumn. It might just be possible if a cargo is ready to load that the ship could return immediately by catching the north east monsoon which starts to blow just at this time. More feasibly, the ship would coast around India trading for a year before catching the north eastern winds the following year. The winds up the Red Sea would also then be favourable and the ship should be back by the spring. By counting years inclusively, as was the norm then, the ships will have been away for three years (one whole year and two part years).

Eudoxus had done this trip twice for the Ptolemies, and the Phœnicians must have done it even more regularly. If there was an outlet to the sea on the Gulf of Aqaba, the Phœnicians will have had access to it under the Persians, and probably will have administered it themselves. Rhys Carpenter does show a healthy degree of skepticism when he notes that such voyages could hardly have been made in the tenth century. He observes that the books of kings in which Solomon's fleet appears takes biblical history to the time of the loss of Jerusalem to Nebuchadrezzar in 586 BC, and so must have been written later.

Later conditions could have been anachronistically ascribed to Solomon's time, so that sea voyages to India [were] in themselves entirely authentic.

They were authentic but were much later in time. In other words the sources of Solomon's incredible wealth did not exist, and neither did he. All of it was written back into the past, the method used throughout the scriptures to create a bogus history.

The story of Satapses trying to sail around Africa proves that the notion was well known in Persia at about the time the Jewish scriptures were being compiled, so the subtle allusion to the fictional Jewish king, Solomon, doing it is simply giving the mythical character an additional kudos that could not have been his—or even Hiram's!



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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 4. Sacred History or Phoney History?

## The Two Judahs: Yehud Benjamin and Yaudi Bar Samal

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### The Two Judahs

The only two tribes not carried away when the statelet of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians, according to the Jewish scriptures, were Judah and Benjamin. Now although these two are always given as two separate names for different groups of people, the two sets of people have never been distinguishable. Both have always simply been Jews.

Benjamin means “Son of the South” and could simply be a description of Judah—Judah, the son of the South. A pointless speculation, you will doubtless think, but it was a singularly apt description, in fact, because there was another Judah in the north of the Levant! Not many people know that!

Several of the kingdoms of the south are paralleled by similarly named northern kingdoms. Musri is in Sinai but is also in Asia Minor. The Judah of the north also seems to be called Samal, or to be twinned with a closely related neighbouring kingdom called Samal. The Judah of the south was similarly identified with a closely related kingdom called Israel or Samaria. The distinguished Assyriologist, Wolfram von Soden, tells us (*The Ancient Orient*) that in an extensive area stretching from Asia Minor through Syria to Egypt, the substratum language does not distinguish between “l” and “r”. So, Samal is in Northern Syria but Samaria is in Palestine, and Yahuda is in Palestine but Yaudi is in Northern Syria! The names Samal and Yaudi seem interchangeable, and the names Judah and Israel also are interchangeable.

The northern Judah is part of the same “highland” regions that are named in *Genesis* as the homeland of Jacob and perhaps Abraham. In short, it seems that the people who “returned” to Judah with the Persian administrators to settle a land they called Judah came from the very part of the world where Judah already existed.

### Aramaeans

Around 1300, the Aramaeans, Semitic people, arrived from Arabia, and were well settled in Syria by about 1000 BC. They occupied some formerly Hittite towns and built others of their own that became the centres of several small city states in the north of the Levant and the Upper Euphrates river. Their brothers, the Chaldaeans supposedly took over southern Babylonia and called it Chaldaea. We know nothing much about these Aramaean states although they undoubtedly have a much greater significance in biblical studies than almost any modern scholar will concede. Mostly we know about them from Assyrian inscriptions and official records, and these are principally accounts of their military subjection, and occasionally of rebellion, and, in respect of Damascus, particularly, the bible, where it does not contradict the other sources. A small number of Aramaean inscriptions pertaining to particular monarchs have been found, the latest being the Tel Dan inscription, if it is genuine.

The most important of these northern Aramaean states were Arpad (Bit Agusi), Bit Adini (Eden), Guzana, and

Yaudi (Samal) at Zinjirli. Further south were Hamath, La'ash and Khattina, still further south was Damascus, the biblical enemy of Israel (Samaria) at this time, but a Beth Rechob and several others are mentioned in 2 *Samuel*. These squabbling minnows united under Irkhuleni, king of Hamath, against the Assyrian pike in 853 BC. Shalmanezar claimed victory with the death of 14,000 of the allies' troops. Ahab of Israel (1 Kgs 16:29ff) participated if we are to take the "Akhabbu Sirla" mentioned on the victory stele as the same man.

A century later, Tiglath-pileser III absorbed the Aramaean kingdoms into his empire as provinces. At this point in the archaeology there is a clear cultural disjuncture as Assyrian artefacts begin to dominate the Aramaean culture, but no overall picture of the pre-Assyrian states has yet been revealed by workers.

Samal has been excavated at Zinjirli (Sinjirli, Senjirli) and is often considered as the capital city of the state of Yaudi. It was a city surrounded by a ring of two walls on a plain at the foot of the Amanus mountains. The walls had three gates and in the centre of the city was a fortified acropolis with a single gate. The interior gates and palaces were decorated with pictures and animal reliefs, like lions, in a style called late-Hittite because it was in the Hittite tradition of its former colonies, and courtyards were colonnaded. Other Aramaean cities had a similar plan, as if the builders had an ideal in mind.

Palace buildings were in the Hilani style, having a porch with two or three columns—the bases of which were richly decorated, sometimes with an animal sculpture—leading into a large room with an oven and several side rooms, usually with a bath. Access to the palace was by a flight of stairs from a courtyard enclosed by walls or other buildings. Each Aramaean city had at least one such palace. No temple was reported at Samal, but a good example of a temple was found at Tell Ta'yinat, where it stood next to the palace. Like the temple of Solomon described in the bible, it faced east, was long, with a porch having two columns, and having at the western end a recess or holy of holies for the cult image. Nothing remotely as impressive has ever been found in Yehud, despite its supposed ancient grandeur.

Aramaean pottery was usually not decorated, although was finished with a red slip. Volkmar Fritz tells us that no catalogue of the pottery remains has ever been produced, further evidence of the sheer irresponsibility, if not idleness and willful destruction by these so-called experts. It is read so often. De Vaux died without producing his report on Qumran and some of the Qumran scholars spent themselves in dipsomaniac studies rather than doing their jobs. Only John Marco Allegro, much villified for alleged poor scholarship by the drunks and time-wasters, had published his quota by 1970. Too many archaeologists are desperate to continue digging to find something that will make their reputation, and that alone, if found, will be written up because they have no time to record the mundane findings that are actually in many ways the most important. Meanwhile the site will have been ruined for any future more conscientious worker.

## **Kings of Yaudi**



**Barrekab on the throne with a scribe. An orthostat from Zinjirli.**

**At the top, by the symbol of the god Sin, Lord of Harran, it says: My Lord the Baal Harran I am Barekab the son of Panammu**

The kings of Yaudi were:

- ☐ Gabbar, a contemporary of Asurnasipal
- ☐ Bamah
- ☐ Hani or Haiani, son of Gabbar, a contemporary of Shalmaneser.
- ☐ Kilammu, son of Haiani
- ☐ Sheil (Saul)
- ☐ Qural
- ☐ Panammu I, son of Qural
- ☐ Barsur, king of Yaudi
- ☐ Panammu II
- ☐ Barrekab, son of Panammu II

When Tiglath-pileser III became king of Assyria in 744 BC, the Assyrian empire had control of most of the fertile crescent of Asia. Only four small Aramaean kingdoms had vestiges of independence: Carchemish, Hamath, Gurgum and Samal.

In 739, Assyria was faced with a threat from the north. Urartu had arisen as a strong kingdom in the mountains around lake Van. It had the natural corridors of the Tigris into Assyria in the east and the Euphrates into Syria and the Mediterranean in the west. Assyrian kings felt obliged to keep Urartu subdued, but the kings of Urartu plotted with the Aramaean kingdoms in the west to rebel against Assyria.

Carchemish sought assistance from Midas in 717 BC to ward off the Assyrian menace. Carchemish was an ancient and refined city, the last remnants of Hittite culture, and had remained independent through clever alliances and diplomacy.

Azriyau (Azariah) of Yaudi, a usurper, sought alliances with the “Nineteen districts of Hamath” against Assyria. This rebel was sieged in his city or in a mountain fortress by the Assyrians and seems to have been killed.

Emil Kraeling, who wrote a seminal work on the history of the Aramaeans, warned us not to confuse Azriyau, a northern personality with Yehouah in his name, of Yaudi (the northern Judah) with his more famous contemporary, Azariah of Judah (Yehud, to the Persians). He is warning the people he expected to read his book, experts on Near Eastern languages and history. So he had reason to think that even experts might get the two mixed up. He was not warning ordinary Jews or Christians because not one of them in a million even know that there was a Yehuda Ben Samal or Yaudi Bar Samal—a Judah, son of the North—to confuse with the one they all knew from the bible—Judah Benjamin—let alone that both had a famous Azariah at the same time. The name Shaddayauda appears on one of the Elamite tablets at Persepolis about 500 BC, and is assumed to be a Jewish name. Yet, it does not contain the name Yahu for Yehouah, but Yauda, apparently the name of the northern kingdom, Yaudi, even though by then it had presumably disappeared. Shaddai is the ancient name of a rain-god that appears in the bible and where scholars assume it to mean Yehouah!

## **Kilammu**

Van Luschan, excavating Zingirli, found a shattered inscription that the skills of the German technicians were able to restore. It was written in a Semitic language, like Canaanite or Phoenician, but had some Aramaic characteristics, such as using “bar” for son. The inhabitants seemed to have been Aramaeans but had retained Canaanite or Phoenician as the basis of their written records for civic and religious purposes. It had been commissioned by Kilammu.

Kilammu complained that his country was surrounded by the realms of powerful kings, each of which was “stretching out his hand against us”—the very tone of the Jewish scriptures. He says he hired the Assyrian king to help him against an enemy, who had no alternative but to yield and give tribute. Kilammu must have yielded to the Assyrians first and been given by them, as a reward, local rights and authority over some neighbours, who therefore disliked the Yaudim.

As an Assyrian protectorate the kingdom seemed to have thrived, for Kilammu boasts about his perfection as an economist and as a diplomat, running his country so well that no one was destitute. He sounds like a version of Solomon (which is not far in pronunciation from Kilammu, with a softening of the initial letter). He says he is like a mother to orphans in his relationship with his subjects, reminding us of Solomon judging the proper mother of the infant.

He urges his successors not to allow the two factions in his population to oppress each other. They might be the older population of Canaanite, Phoenician and Hittite stock and the incomers of Aramaean stock. One of the groups are the Barir, a word used later in Aramaic to mean a foreigner. There might be an implication that the two groups were natives and people forcibly settled there by Hittite or Assyrian kings. Whatever the source of the two factions, the situation reflects precisely the division in the history of Israel between the Jews and the Canaanites.

The end of Kilammu’s inscription is a curse on anyone who tried to destroy it, to be upheld by the gods invoked:

Baal Semed, who is Gabbar's, Baal Haman, who is Bamah's, and Rekabel, who is Baal of my House.

Darius the Great used the same threat against would be desecraters of his monuments, and the same threat appears at the end of *Revelation*, a book much older than Christianity, but Christianized.

Kilammu's inscription is marked by three symbols, one for each god—horns, a bridle and a waning moon superimposed on a full moon. Rekabel is a war god shown as a charioteer and so represented by a bridle. This god is obviously the source of the name of the biblical Rechabites, whose name is also taken to mean charioteers. Haman is a moon god, like the Carthaginian Baal Hamon. Semed is an ox god representing a team of oxen and therefore agriculture. Kilammu himself holds a flower not a weapon, suggesting he is a vassal because independent kings show themselves holding weapons.

## **Panammu**

Panammu I left an inscription on a huge statue of Hadad. Like Kilammu, he boasts of how well off his subjects are. Another inscription occurs on a memorial to Panammu II set up by his son, Bar Rekab. Panammu II was the son of Bar Sur, king of Yaudi. Bar Sur meaning "Son of Assur" might suggest Assyrian origins or at least a close association. Panammu had a serious insurrection or coup to face in his reign. The stele gives no details but the records of the Assyrians reveal that it was nothing other than the rebellion of Azriyau. Bar Sur and 70 kinsmen were murdered by the rebels. Many other loyal retainers and subjects must also have been killed because the cities were left desolate. The disruption of production and agriculture led to inflation and Panammu gives the price of commodities in shekels.

Panammu appealed to the Assyrians and the rebels were forced out. He "took the hem of the skirt of his lord, the king of Assur," who placed him over "the governors and princes of Yaudi." So, he even had power over some Assyrian governors. He had been made a Satrap of the Assyrians. "His lord, the king of Assur gave him preference over the powerful kings," and he accompanied Tiglath-pileser as an officer on his conquests.

He adds a note to the policy of pacification by deportation, showing that local governors like himself carried it out in practice because "the daughters of the east he brought to the west and the daughters of the west he brought to the east." He died during the siege of Damascus and was returned home by the Assyrian king with full honours. The inscription ends declaring itself to be a memorial and calling upon the gods of Yaudi as witnesses including Hadad, El, Shamash and Rekabel.

Another Bar Rekab inscription, illustrated above, shows the king greeting a scribe. It is surmounted by a short inscription and some symbols of gods (as before) but including a five pointed star within concentric circles. Again the king holds a flower. The inscription reads: "I am Bar Rekab, son of Panammu," and further across, "My lord Baal Harran." Above is the moon symbol of the god, Sin—Baal Harran! A similar monument says the king built a better palace than the kings had previously had from the time of Kilammu.

Panammu I and II both call themselves kings of Yaudi but Bar Rekab calls his fathers kings of Samal while calling himself king of Yaudi. Kilammu also called himself king of Yaudi. The Assyrians called Haiani and Panammu kings of Samal but Azriyau is described as Yaudi. No one has an explanation of all this but it remarkably parallels the confusion of the Judah of the south and Israel.

The Palestinian Judah obviously existed after the exile, appearing in 407 BC in a letter from Elephantine to Bagoas, governor of Judah, on Yehud (Judah) coins from the 4th century BC, and Yehud seals from the 4th-2nd centuries BC. But Judah is mentioned from time to time throughout the Assyrian period, the earliest being in two references to Ahaz King of Judah from the 700s BC:

- ❑ A clay seal (bulla) reads “Ahaz Jotham King of Judah.”
- ❑ An inscription of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III at Calah (Nimrud) says “Jehoahaz of Judah” paid tribute to the Assyrian king.

The question is: Is this the Aramaean Yaudi or the Jewish country? Or even, was Yaudi transported to the Palestinian hill country?

Yaudi in Syria disappears about this time and references to a Judah in Palestine appear, and even the bible records that the Assyrians settled Aramaeans in Israel. Were these the ruling nobility of Yaudi, who effectively founded a new Yaudi, perpetuating the history of the older one. If so, Judah was Israel, being the old kingdom, or part of it re-named by the new rulers from Yaudi.

The “city of Judah” fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC, according to Babylonians records, and rations issued to Judean captives, including Jehoiachin, are also recorded, appearing too in the bible.

Sargon II (721-705 BC) vigorously put down the rebellion of Yaubidi (another northerner whose name contained the god, Yehouah) in Hamath, then defeated the Arabs of Gaza and the Egyptians. His successor, Sennacherib (704-681 BC) ravaged Judah except for Jerusalem which was spared to pay tribute under Hezekiah (714-686 BC).

An inscription of Sennacherib shows that the Assyrians had the habit of anointing with oil as a sign of veneration as well as offering sacrifices.



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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 5. Persian Propaganda**  
**Who Wrote the Hebrew Scriptures?**

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## **The History of the Bible**

People obsessed with their image of the Hebrew god see pre-rabbinic Judaism as a constant religion going back to the time of the Patriarchs. In this view, the Hebrew god, Yehouah, now just called God, had His metaphorical hand in Jewish history throughout and Judaism evolved in a straight line until, for Christians, God dispensed with the Jews as a hopeless choice and turned his attention to the Christians. The bible is proof of it, the outcome of an inevitable growth.

Philip Davies, a professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield, UK, tells us history is all about “human decisions, about change, about design but also about accident”. He has written an interesting account of Jewish literacy while working on the compilation of the Jewish canon, work for which we are indebted here. And like all human endeavour, the bible is the result of discrete decisions throughout its history.

Believers of the written revelation varieties of religion typically venerate their canons, if not their gods. They prefer to imagine their bible as handed down by God and cannot abide the idea that they really emerged from a process of human decision making. Anyone who takes on the task of tracing the historical development of biblical books invites accusations of sacrilege from these excessively sanctimonious people, who must fear that something might be discovered in the study that will make them look fools. So much for their faith.

Yet, the possession of a set of Holy Writings can be nothing other than good, to them, though a moment's reflexion will show that a canon is a form of censorship, intended to control the way believers think, and thus preserve the benefits of the few against those of the many. Such canons are also deeply conservative. They present eternal values which supposedly transcend history. Whether freezing forever a glorious culture or encoding the eternally valid words of a transcendent deity, they seek to defy or overcome the processes of history, in which cultures progress, age and decay, values change, and knowledge accumulates and in which the evolution of languages shifts the meanings of words.

Religious canons were not the product of the body of adherents of a religion, but of those, rabbis or bishops, who identified themselves as the leaders and definers of values. Canonizing is elitist in conception and authoritarian in implementation. Canonizing typically ends by dictating a culture through a fixed list of what is and what is not canonical. It is thus an entirely open question whether or not fixed, closed and authoritative canons are a good thing at all. Perhaps it depends on how they are used. But typically they are imposed.

## **Canon**

The word “canon” is Greek and means a standard, the metaphorical sense coming from the practical use which was that of a rule or measure. The Greeks developed the idea of canon as a collection of values, principles, books, works of art and so on. Collections of works were made in the Greek and Hellenistic world specifically

as canons, and could cover a range of topics, like art, medicine, technology or philosophy. But, these canons were neither exclusive or closed. The scholars of the Alexandrine library used the word “canon” of collections of ancient authors, and it is probably from here that Christians got their use of the word.

Being listed as part of a collection is, however, the final phase of canonisation. Before that a work must have value. Some texts are rewritten and copied more than others. As this process takes place, these texts become more familiar, more ancient and more respected. Such works become quoted, and influence other works. They become what we would call “classic”. Such a work has been canonized by being copied repeatedly until its status as a classic is ensured. Then it might be classified as belonging to a collection of some kind. So, classic works are a canon, even when that canon is not formally listed.

Judaism was always considered to have had its canon from the earliest times with no questions asked about it. Yet in those times, the romance of Moses notwithstanding, nobody living a nomadic pastoral lifestyle could write. Canonising requires literacy and Jewish canonizing began when literacy was a monopoly of the class of scribes.

## **Scribes**

E W Heaton (*The School Tradition of the Old Testament*, Oxford: OUP, 1994) invents a tradition of scribal school education in Judah and posits the existence of libraries, including a “Temple Seminary” preserving the literary tradition of monarchic Judah beyond the demise of the state. Speculative reconstructions of these poorly recorded times always favour the bible, despite the fact that no other evidence supports these speculations of early literacy in Israel and Judah, and then these speculations get spouted in pulpits. Such authors have to turn to Egypt and Babylonia to find scribes that could not have been taught in Judah or Samaria. Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations possessed scribal schools. What evidence then is there of literacy, of administrative complexity, and of scribal education in monarchic Israel and Judah?

The bible depicts the court of David and Solomon as grand and civilised, so the people must have been literate, and there must have been excellent scribal schools to furnish such good historians as the court historian assumed to have written all this. Literate people needed schools, and so they are a reasonable assumption from the “time of David”. If the bible is ignored as a late romance, it is *not* reasonable. But once the assumption is made that there were schools, the bible provides the biblicists with evidence that the schools multiplied and there must have been primary schools, secondary schools, comprehensive schools, grammar schools, mathematical schools, astronomical schools, high schools, religious schools, government schools, regional schools, and so on, and so on.

It must mean that there is in the ground a lot of old texts waiting for earnest biblical archaeologists to find them. There are actually so few that forging them has become an industry for believers. What few archaeological epigraphic sources have been found are late, many from the end of the lifetime of Israel and Judah in the seventh and sixth centuries BC. Isserlin has to conclude from actual field work:

No certain traces of school buildings or classrooms have been found...

All that has been found indicative of tuition is a few isolated ostraca with apparently simple writing exercises on them. At best, this suggests individual tuition, not a school. Biblical scholarship is wild speculation no different

from fantasy.

Israel Finkelstein, the prominent Israeli archaeologist, has no doubt that no written sources come from the time of the United Monarchy, and evidence for a scribal culture in monarchic Judah is slight. One of the indices of scribal activity is the complexity of state administration. David Jamieson–Drake, from an anthropological model, concludes that, though Judah was a fully developed monarchic state from the eighth century, literacy did not spread very far. All writing is associated with government and thus with the specialized administrative class. On Jamieson–Drake’s analysis, there is no likelihood of literacy much beyond this small class.

There is no direct evidence of the Israelites having books—any books, biblical or otherwise—before the Persian period. Archaeologists look for written material in Israel or Judah and do not find any until much later. No evidence of actual writing in ink on papyrus or parchment has been found before the “exile” except for a tiny fragment of papyrus found at Murabba’ at by the Dead Sea. Not even any scribbles of the putatively influential prophets or their admirers have ever been found. The closest is the mention of an unknown prophet in the late Lachish ostraca. How were the writings of Moses and the prophets preserved for hundreds of years without leaving a shred of evidence?

Finkelstein is adamant there is no evidence of significant literacy in Israel, in Judah, in Jerusalem, before the eighth century BC, and no appreciable output until the seventh. Therefore, nothing in the Jewish scriptures can be dated before the eighth century. Fragmentary material from the ninth century is possible, but anything as early as the twelfth or eleventh centuries is impossible. Only scholarly caution allows for the vague possibility of some small traces of anything older than the eighth century. B S J Isserlin, in *The Israelites*, agrees that “hardly any epigraphic evidence pre-dates the eighth century BC” and most of it comes from Judah not Israel. In the imaginery early period of the Israelite nation, up until about 900 BC, no sources are known other than a few isolated ostraca, and the bible!

Biblicists think that parts of the bible are preserved in genuinely ancient form. They then only have to guess which parts! They pick on bits of poetry—the Song of the Sea (*Ex* 15), the Song of Deborah (*Jg* 5), the Testament of Jacob (*Gen* 49), the Oracles of Balaam (*Num* 23-24), the Blessing of Moses (*Dt* 33), and the Song of Moses (*Dt* 32)—and in that order of age. David’s Lament for Jonathan (*2 Sam* 1:17-27), *Psalms* 18 (*2 Sam* 22), and *Psalms* 113 are other early works, they say.

Different scholars have dated the *Song of Moses* to anywhere between the twelfth and second century BC. The early date is advocated by only a few “scholars”, like Frank Moore Cross, the Albrightian biblicist. Most prefer a later date, many after the Persian conquest. The *Song of Deborah* is also dated early by biblicists like Cross and D N Freedman, who always stretch credulity in dating elements of the bible impossibly early. They accept the internal chronology of the bible to work out the evolution of the Hebrew language, presuming the differences they find are evolutionary differences, not dialectal or just idiosyncrasies. Isserlin says a feature of these works is that they use “uncommon or archaic” forms—a semi-honest phrase because it does not assume that the forms are archaic. They might indeed just be uncommon, but the “scholars” assume they are archaic.

A seventh century ostrakon from Mesad Hashavyahu is written by a harvest worker pleading for his confiscated garment to be returned. This man’s everyday style of writing is archaic, in scholarly terms. Their excuse is that he is trying to make his letter sound grave—just as a modern labourer would write a letter to a magistrate in

biblical English to impress the official, wouldn't he?. Will the biblical scholars consider that their archaic Hebrew was a dialect of Canaanite? No chance.

Fairly consistent differences are found between poetry and prose in the bible, but there is nothing surprising in that. Poets are always more inclined to use archaic vocabulary to give their verse gravitas, but that does not mean their language is genuinely archaic, and otherwise the composition is not. One could argue that Hebrew poetic forms were intended to be memorable, and therefore would be written in the dialect of those meant to remember their message—the ordinary people.

There was a tendency to linguistic conservatism.

Few biblical texts can be dated at all accurately.

B S J Isserlin, *The Israelites*

Despite these caveats, the Hebrew scholars have discovered to their own satisfaction how Hebrew evolved. Isserlin himself is not free of assuming the “uncommon” forms are archaic:

They [supposed early texts] tend to make rather restricted use of items absent or exceptional in Canaanite speech, but regularly used in later biblical Hebrew.

Suddenly, he too knows which of the biblical Hebrew is early and which is late. The tentative list above has been confirmed as early. What the scholars find inevitably confirms their assumptions. If it is possible to use certain criteria to judge an evolution of a language, it still does not give an absolute date, but only grades the texts relatively. If *Ezekiel* is judged a late text, the question is, “How Late?” For biblicists it is sixth century when it might be third century. The false and mythical chronology of the bible is believed when it is like believing Plato's myth of Atlantis.

## **Literary Output**

What literature did the monarchic scribal class produce?

No complete or even fragmentary examples either of biblical texts or of works quoted in the bible and dating from the Israelite period have so far been found.

B S J Isserlin, *The Israelites*

God does not seem to be helping His faithful to establish their case. Rather He seems intent on making forgers or a laughing stock out of them. The only example found, supposed to be a biblical extract, is part of the priestly blessing (*Num* 6:24-26) scratched on a tiny thin piece of silver in an amulet container found in a rich tomb at Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem. What is found is not a passage from the bible, but a general blessing, albeit identifiably the same one. It is therefore not evidence of the bible at this date but evidence that the bible incorporated popular sayings or prayers when it was written.

Moses wrote five books of adventures, commandments and laws, all brought about under the personal direction of God, who dwelt with His people for much of this time in his own tent. People today are still amazed and impressed by this, but more amazing is that the extensive literary efforts of the founder of the Israelite nation and the bearer of God's covenant and Law did not impress his own followers enough to make them want to keep copies of his words.

The Torah was supposedly written about 1400 BC, yet the Israelites and Jews in the next millennium never left a trace of it anywhere. *I said a trace of it anywhere!* Barmy US judges today will write the commandments on the walls of their courtroom, and Inquisitors in the sixteenth century would inscribe them in their torture chambers, but the people whom God chose never wrote them down. Apologists argue they were too sacred! Why then are they written down today in millions of copies, and why, if they were too sacred, did God tell Moses to instruct the people to write the Law on plastered walls in public view? Moses and the elders commanded the people:

Keep all the commandments which I command you this day. And it shall be on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which the Yehouah thy God giveth thee, that thou shalt set thee up great stones, and plaster them with plaster. And thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law...

*Deuteronomy 27:1-3*

Is it not surprising then that these plastered stelae are not common all over Israel and Judah from an early time as a sure sign of Jewish monotheism and the story of Moses itself? No Israelite ever did it, even pious kings like Hezekiah and Josiah—who is supposed to have rediscovered this important law. The only case of an inscription on plaster is the one found by H J Franken at Deir Alla, east of the Jordan near the lower Zerqa river. It is written in red and black ink on plaster but is not in Hebrew, and not in the Palestinian hills which were the centers of these supposed statelets. It mimics a book in presentation, proving that people had books in the eighth century, but apparently not the bible. Only in the third century BC did God's holy words emerge. It strongly suggests that is when they were written.

Except for eighth century Samaria ostraca—brief and stereotyped administrative dockets—the northern kingdom has so far supplied little epigraphic material so that we are left badly informed about the important question of to what extent northern Israelite standard Hebrew diverged from Jerusalemite Hebrew after the political split.

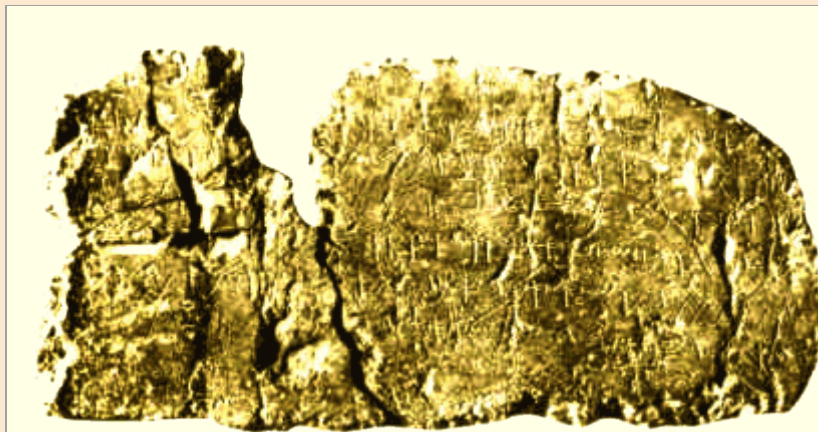
B S J Isserlin, *The Israelites*



Priestly  
Blessing on  
silver leaf from  
Ketef Hinnom



These are administrative texts recording deliveries of wine and oil. They were found in the foundations of a building, and will have been an archive of accounts. The transactions are all local, and do not suggest any extensive literacy.



Inscription in the Siloam Tunnel. The best the kings of Israel and Judah could manage

Moreover, official inscriptions, seals and bullae, ostraca and so on, that attest to literacy, state formation and evolution of society in Judah and in Jerusalem—that there is a state in Judah—do not begin to appear until the late eighth century BC, only about a century before the end of the state's life—and none unequivocally denoting a specified king of Judah or Samaria. Monumental inscriptions are extremely unusual. Few royal inscriptions come from Israel, and none from Judah. Prominent

monuments, like the Moabite stone and the Tel Dan inscription, if it is genuine, were not Israelite. The Mesha stele is not in Hebrew, though it is Canaanite, but another dialect of it, considered as Moabite. The Siloam tunnel inscription is not carved in a monumental script but a cursive one (like writing) casting doubt on its status. If Israelite and Judahite monarchs had scribes who could write inscriptions, the lack of inscriptions in the field is a puzzle.

The famous seal of Shema, servant of Jeroboam is normally attributed to king Jeroboam of the eighth century, although some want it to mean Jeroboam I in the tenth! Amazing! Shema and particularly Shemaiah occur peculiarly often in *Chronicles*, a late work by everyone's criteria. Officials are usually signified, and some seem to tie in with biblical figures, most usually in the late parts of the biblical history. Nearly all are dated in relation to the main destruction layer in Lachish, assumed to be Sennacherib's siege. If it were a later destruction associated with the Egyptian rebellion and that of Megabyxos in Persian times, then the dates are seriously out.

The Persian period is not sexy enough for biblicists and so they pretend it never happened. Isserlin



Shema Seal



admits the scripts on the seals vary little, suggesting they were common in a particular, fairly narrow, time period. Logically, that would be the Persian period. For biblicists, whatever is found is pre-“exilic” or “exilic” at the latest. The “return” is a non-event, archaeologically. The Persians actually ruled these bare hills for 200 years—as long as the actual lifetimes of the individual statelets—but Persian influence seems to have been invisible. There is a dark age at this point in Palestinian history, to judge by the biblicists. From about 520 till 300 BC, all that happened was that Alexander acknowledged the Jewish god. The reason for this fakery is that Jewish history only began in this time. The biblicists have been determined to hide it. Until the Persians set up Yehud, the history of these hills was Canaanite history.

Some official correspondence has been preserved—the Arad ostraca—if Arad ever belonged to Judah—and the “Lachish letters” are probably written down by officials, both cities being large enough to have royal scribes. 17 ostraca found at Lachish are the Lachish letters dated precisely to 588 BC, but more probably from about 450 BC. A military mission to Egypt is mentioned, and the likely occasion is the rebellion of Egypt against Persia around the middle of the fifth century. In any event, nothing favours a scribal class comparable to those of Mesopotamia or Egypt, nor even to cities the size of Ebla, Ugarit or even Bronze Age Hazor. There were no cities of anything like this size in monarchic Israel or Judah.

Excavations in both residential and government towns have revealed a striking paucity of cult buildings.

B S J Isserlin, *The Israelites*

This might seem remarkable, but really it probably confirms one thing that the bible suggests strongly—the custom in these parts was to worship *al fresco*. The bible repeatedly speaks of the apostates worshipping in “bamahs” or “high places”. High places will have been normally a bare hill top, with an unhewn or roughly hewn altar on it, and covered shrines will have been unusual. Rooftops could have served as high places, but worship was generally beneath an open sky to judge from the biblical Ahaz who erected altars at every street corner (2 Chr 28:24), and *Ezekiel 16:24-25*:

Woe to you that you have also built yourself a mound, and you have made yourself a high place in every open place! At the head of every highway you have built your high place...

*Ezek 16:24-25 Literal*

The first Persian colonists seem to have continued the tradition, it being Persian practice too, but the Later Persians had been Babylonized, and had taken to temple worship. That is when the Jerusalem temple was set up, and the earlier practice disparaged.

Finkelstein is certain that the bible was compiled in Judah, because the text reflects only the ideology of Judah. Judah is in the ideological center of the whole thing. Judah is the place where the history is compiled. The lack of evidence of literacy in Judah until the seventh century BC, suggests the bible was compiled in Jerusalem in the Persian period, or, Finkelstein thinks, possibly in the late Judahite monarchy. The Persian period is overwhelmingly the more likely, but, in either case, the question is whether the authors had written sources, and where they came from if it was not Judah.

## **Scribes in the Second Temple Period**

J Schaper, in a paper called *The Jerusalem Temple as an Instrument of the Achaemenid Fiscal Administration* in 1995 says that, in the Second Temple period, the Persians employed the Temple personnel to collect imperial taxes and deliver them to the imperial representative. Substantial scribal activity, combining imperial and cultic business, therefore grew. The lists of officials the Chronicler assigns to David may be fictitious but it suggests that the Chronicler regarded an extensive scribal–administrative class as plausible. Judah in the Persian period was a cultural backwater and economically poor but the growth of literacy and scribal activity set a base for development. The Jewish state did not exist as an autonomous political entity but Jerusalem benefited from being a provincial capital of a mighty empire with an extensive bureaucracy.

The scribes were largely insulated from most of the people, who were illiterate for many centuries more. Scribes were a privileged class because of their skills, and lived in cities when most people worked on the land, were paid by the state and attended its courts. Nevertheless society was unsophisticated and there were points of contact between the higher classes and the peasantry, in the market places, for example. The emergence of an artisan and merchant class during the Second Temple period provided additional stepping stones for an upwardly mobile peasant, but there were, of course, few of them.

To call these men scribes is to underestimate their real position. We take reading and writing for granted, but then it was a highly prized skill. Like most skills, the scribes will initially have taught their own children and a scribe will have taken his father's profession. These people were not just secretaries or scribblers, they were intellectuals, who studied accountancy, economics, mathematics and astronomy, as well as sacred texts. They were wise men or sages, the literate Jewish equivalent of the Magi and Druids.

Such accomplishments eventually would require an extensive educational system or scribal schools in which not just the writing of Hebrew, but the reading of other languages, mastery of diplomatic forms, principles of archiving and so on would be passed on. Undoubtedly there were scribal schools later, in the Hellenistic age. In the Ptolemaic and Seleucid periods Judah's wealth increased considerably, and the later we move in date the easier it is to conclude that the temple could sustain a number of scribal schools with a vigorous literary activity. The later in time, the better evidence we have for scribal activity. Even if holy scribbling began before the Second Temple period, it continued and increased during this period. Since scribblers were rare before then, but common afterwards, what is the objection to postulating that the scriptures were actually written when scribbling was popular? The onus of proof of the antiquity of the scriptures lies on those who want to argue that they were written earlier. If less likely, it remains possible, but must be shown, not assumed.

The education of the scribe broadened in the Hellenistic period, and they spread their values to non–scribes. In the second century BC literacy had become more widespread in Judah because of Greek influence, the growth of international trade under Persia, the emergence of a middle class of merchants and artisans, and the growth of the administrative class, especially under the Ptolemies. Ben Sira invites his readers to attend his school, possibly even without payment, but the range of topics in his book shows he is not training scribes, but offering an education to anyone who wanted to study.

Literacy spread and the scribes themselves found a wider demand for their services. Concomitantly, they expanded their own intellectual interests to accommodate those of the widened circle. According to 2 *Maccabees* 4:9–14 (cf. 1 *Macc* 1:14), a “gymnasium” and an “ephebeion” were introduced into Jerusalem, in 175 BC. No doubt the many Greek cities already established and those still to be built especially on the

Palestinian coast, in the Decapolis and Samaria also had them.<sup>2</sup> *Maccabees* says the priests eagerly frequented them. If the Hasmoneans officially disapproved of these institutions, they were unable or unwilling to halt the spread of Greek education. But they were in a position to foster the Hebrew language, create a Hebrew library, and, perhaps, encourage the development of a Jewish version of the Greek style of education. Between the scribal school and the later rabbinic school, whose aim was religious—to turn out good Jews—are developments we know little about. An emphasis on teaching Judaism (in its various forms) emerged, while some of the basic elements of Greek education (music, gymnastics) were discouraged. Given the indispensability of the Greek language, and the presence of so many Greek-speaking Jews both resident in and visiting Jerusalem, education for the priestly, administrative and ruling classes in Judah must have included many Greek aspects.

The distinction between a professional education and a non-professional education entails a distinction between kinds of writing too, which is visible in the canonized literature. We can identify literary activity undertaken by the scribes in furtherance of their professional interests, writings that display the scribal ethos—historiographic, didactic, liturgical, and legal. Such writings, since they belong in spirit as well as in letter to the scribal class, lend themselves naturally to being canonized by copying, studying and teaching in the schools. Given the likelihood of specialization among the scribes, where different branches dealt with the temple cult, the temple liturgy, fiscal administration, diplomatic correspondence with Persian officials, and perhaps much else, we may be able to identify particular schools as the main agents of canonizing.

### Non-Cultic Scriptural Books

But not all the canonized books or stories come from a scribal milieu. Many stories—*Joseph, Jonah, Ruth, Esther, Daniel*—deal with questions of ethnicity, sometimes to the suppression of piety. For *Jonah* and *Ruth*, non-Jews are not to be shunned; for *Esther* and *Daniel* Jewish identity is something to be preserved from threatening foreigners, even though foreign rulers are not always bad. The question of “identity,” a matter of national importance, in the torah and prophetic books, becomes a more “personal” matter. What does it mean *for an individual* to be a Judean rather than a Yehudim?

These stories ascribe little importance to the temple or cult. Jonah mocks it in his psalm: it has nothing to do with *Esther* or *Ruth*, and *Solomon’s Song* is unconnected with his temple building. These writings show an interest in individual identity. In the wider cultural world they inhabit, their own social identity is important. Jonah, Esther, Ruth and Daniel all deal with the image of a Jew (or “Hebrew”) among non-Jews, relecting not just a diaspora world but also a cosmopolitan Judah. Their travels, too, force them to face the question of their ethnic identity. Jonah, asked who he is: he answers:

I am a Hebrew and worship Yehouah the god of heaven.

Ethnically he regarded himself as a Hebrew and religiously as a Jew—a worshipper of Yehouah. After the Maccabees, what that meant was what Judean schools would teach—the Hebrews *were* Jews, a people with a land as well as a god.

How do writings like these get into the canon of holy scripture? The likely answer is that these works were used in the scribal school curriculum. Even today, *Jonah, Ruth* and *Esther* are used as college texts for classical

Hebrew because they are short and grammatically simple. These works were easy to learn yet were edifying to a young Jew in an increasingly cosmopolitan world. They were put on to scrolls in the school libraries purely for teaching literacy. Now they are the word of God!

## Signs in the Texts

Canonizing involves composition, editing, archiving, combining on a scroll, and collecting scrolls into larger units. There is no *single* canonical mechanism. *Psalms* and *Proverbs* once comprised separate collections brought together in a single scroll. Writing them on one scroll had implications for archiving. The scroll had to be given a convenient name. When it was next copied, it would be as a single composition. Hence the *Psalms* scroll is Davidic and the *Proverbs* scroll Solomonic.

Traces of the canonical process remain within the Jewish canon. Several collections within *Psalms* are headed “of David” and the *Dead Sea Scrolls* and the *New Testament* agree in assigning all the psalms to David. Yet besides psalms of David, there are psalms of ascent and psalms of the Korahites present in sequences that show they were collected together before they were collected into the *Book of Psalms*. *Psalms* is composed of five books, and the Q11 psalms scroll shows that all but the last book had been fixed into a canonical shape by the end of the 1st century BC.

What we now call chapters 1–39 of *Isaiah*, at first written on a scroll, as a complete work but then a shorter work was added giving us now what we call chapters 40–66. The scroll was archived under “Isaiah”. The scroll became a “book” of “Isaiah.” A canon of “Daniel” stories may also be mooted: in this case supplemented by a series of later additions, this scroll became the *Book of Daniel* in different Aramaic/Hebrew and Greek forms. Much the same process accounts for the canon of *Enoch*, now known as *1 Enoch*, but once composed of four or five separate compositions.

At the other end of the scale, we also have multi-scroll canons such as the Mosaic books, while scrolls that contain accounts of a period of history will, under the guidance of a process seeking to create a single comprehensive history, become moulded into a sequential narrative. Once a single more or less coherent narrative is achieved, it can become canonical.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 5. Persian Propaganda**  
**The Prophets: The Persian Propagandists**

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### **Elijah and Elisha**

Biblicists always have trouble in seeing through the internal chronology of the bible. They know full well that the Jews were particularly fond of writing pseudepigraphs, works that pretend to be by an authoritative writer. There is a whole faculty of biblicism devoted to studying pseudepigraphs, but too many biblical experts refuse to accept that the bible itself is full of them. They will accept the odd book, such as *Daniel* as being a pseudepigraph because it is so obvious it cannot be denied, but they will persist that other books of the prophets are all historical works, contemporary with the events they describe! The prophets are known entirely from the bible. They are not historical figures. Christian commentators will give convincing sounding lives and times of the prophets but they are paraphrases of the bible tied in with contemporary history also from the bible or from the supposed time of the events.

In a world that was happily polytheistic, biblicists believe it is credible that strange men should stand up and decry all the deities that people knew and loved, and mainly escape with their lives. Not only that, but their obviously unpalatable message that there was only one god—the prophets carried on with their ranting for several hundred years (c 800-c 600 BC) with no apparent effect—nevertheless, and inconsistently, was recorded in a time and place where writing was expensive and unusual so that it is now still readable in God's Holy word. A miracle!

The core of the prophetic messages was in three parts—a rebuke, a call for repentance, and a threat. It was the threats that were supposedly prophetic, being the threat of conquest or exile—threats that were, remarkably enough, realised! They were realised, obviously enough, because the prophetic books were written after the events threatened had already occurred. They were written after the colonisation of Judah by the Persian colonists.

The Hebrew word for prophets is “nebiim”, singular, “nabi”, as plain as the nose on your face, a word derived from the name “Nabu” (Nebo, in the bible) of a Babylonian god—the one considered, like Mercury, to have been the messenger of the gods. A “nabi” in the Jewish scriptures is a man who brings a message from God. The message from God in the scriptures was the rebuke against idolatry—supposedly at a time when all religion consisted of worshipping idols or symbols—or apostasy, and the promised threat of retribution if the backsliding did not cease. To anyone rational, the nature of the rebuke and the realisation of prophesied threat ought to be proof enough that the books were not accounts of contemporary history, but were written when the rebuke meant something and the prophecy had already happened—after the “return” from Babylon.

The Persian religion was itself a singular religion in that it was the first to forbid representation of its transcendental God, Ahuramazda. The message of the prophets was the message of the Persian religion that could have meant nothing to the people of the Palestinian hills until Persians arrived to settle there after about 500 BC. The messages of the prophets also had a political function—the people of these tiny countries were

warned not to support their powerful neighbours, Egypt and Babylonia, at a time when they were bound to be in the sphere of influence of one or the other. This additional message suited the Persian conquerors of these countries.

The significance of the prophets is immense in explaining the origins of Judaism. They were professional propagandists used by the Persians to predispose people towards their way of thinking, and it is known that Cyrus used such propagandists in preparing to attack a country. Propaganda was doubtless always their function. They were messengers all right but were messengers usually for the king or various parties acting in the country. They were the radio stations or news stands, or the equivalent of the medieval town cryer, but sponsored by different factions.

Prophets were the soap box orators of their time. They stood on market places or at cross roads haranguing the passing crowds with their assessment of the state of the nation. At certain times, some will have been favouring foreign intervention. Prophets claimed to be speaking on behalf of God and they proclaimed it, defended it and fought for it like latter day politicians. In fact, they did not do this out of the love of God or from his instructions but, just as politicians do at election times—to influence the people.

Christians, even clever ones, think that prophets could read the future. Many Christian scholars and commentators accept that they foresaw the fall of Jerusalem or Babylon or Tyre. Thus, they can tell us without a blush that Isaiah lived in the seventh century and Daniel in the sixth century, even though they prophesied later events. It ought to be evident that Isaiah and Daniel either lived after their supposed prophecies occurred, or their prophecies and probably they too were projected into the past by later writers who knew what had happened.

The prophetic books are misplaced in our bibles, appearing at the back of the *Old Testament*, but they had been written when most other books including the *Pentateuch* were being written as is plain from prophetic references and allusions. Even within the books of prophets, they are not in their correct order. Except for the short works, the books of the prophets were obviously not written by a single author, despite absurd recent attempts by purblind Christian “scholars” to maintain the opposite, contrary to the obvious clues within the books themselves. They are collections of visions and utterances compiled and placed into an historical situation as a pseudepigraph.

Some prophets do not have their own books but appear in the “historical” section of the bible. Elijah and Elisha are the best known. Really Elijah and Elisha two are the two sides of the same coin. They appear in the Deuteronomic History as the prophets who oppose and defeat the worshippers of the Baals. Elijah, which means “My God is Yehouah”, stands for the struggle against the Canaanite gods, in which the prophet, as his name implies, is the determined assertion of the new god, Yehouah defying the native religions. Elisha, which means “My God is Salvation”, is the prophet symbolising Yehouah’s victory over the Baals—Yehouah is asserted and the people saved by their allegiance to him. The Canaanite gods are in disarray, the objects only of apostasy. Again, the pair symbolize the El to Yehouah transition that occurred in the fifth century.

## Isaiah

Nothing in the book of Isaiah after chapter 39 is the work of the eighth century prophet, and perhaps



even very little before.

B S J Isserlin, *The Israelites*

Isaiah is supposed to be an eighth century prophet living in Jerusalem, and the first 39 chapters maintain that pretence. Chapter 40-55 are more honest, being supposedly written in the “exile”, while the last chapters 56-66 seem to be written some time after the “return.”

If the prophets were Persian propagandists, they were fifth and fourth century figures partly written back into the imaginary history of the Jews to give a mixed group of colonists a basis for self identity, unity and patriotism. Even then, within the major sections, there are obvious inserts of different authorship and date. Commentators make out that each prophet founded a prophetic school and the biblical “prophet” is a compilation of the work of members over the years. A simpler hypothesis is that the words of official propagandists had been collected thematically for the use of the temple priesthood in warning the people to be obedient. The theme is reflected in the name of the prophet, so the book of a prophet of a certain name began as a collection of oracles or warnings by Persian infiltrators or sympathisers with a particular message.

William Neil, in his popular one volume commentary on the bible, can say:

It was in Babylon that the Jews most noticeably acquired their sense of being different, of being a peculiar and indeed superior race.

The truth is that this sense was not acquired, it was deliberately given to them by the Persians so that they would set up the temple state of Yehud. The prophets were the people who conditioned them into their beliefs. They were taught by prophets before they had any law, and possibly in some cases like Ezekiel before they were transported to Yehud.

Commentators will tell us that in “exile”, the Jews, devoid of a temple for expression of their piety, expressed it in ways that made them unusual and exclusive in the foreign society. They emphasized the sabbath, their food taboos and their cleanliness and purity laws. These practices “marked them out as being different.” It is nonsense. The sabbath was observed by the Babylonians who considered it an unlucky day and did not work on it. The Persians observed meticulous food and purity laws because in their Zoroastrian religion, some things were of the evil creation and polluted Ahuramazda’s good creation. Thus, they had to be avoided. What reason had the Jews for avoiding them? When the Babylonians and their conquerors observed with better reason, the supposed practices of the alien Jews, how were they making themselves different? They were doing the opposite. They were assimilating to the local customs and practices not expressing their own exclusiveness derived from a supposed unique religious conviction.

The “returners” were not an exiled ethnic group of people but people of mixed race, probably mainly Aramaeans and Assyrians from the small kingdoms in the north of the Levant and Syria, possibly with some Greeks. They will have had some initial coaching in a simplified form of Zoroastrianism, giving rise to the idea that some of the prophets worked in exile, but then were sent on their imposed mission to set up a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (*Ex 19:6*)—the temple state and treasury of Abarnahara.

## **First Isaiah**

Christian commentators ask us to consider the time and the place of the prophecies to put them in context, but every point of detail we have about their time and place is supplied by the same book of myths. Some historical events, known by the Persian compilers from Assyrian records, served as an historical framework. *First Isaiah* pretends to be in Jerusalem before its fall to the Babylonians, in the period of Assyrian domination. It uses the conquests of these two aggressive nations to warn the colonists and the native people they are to rule that the same fate can be expected if they do not obey God.

*First Isaiah* has been considerably edited and expanded at a later date, probably finally in the time of the Maccabees by the Hasids or Essenes whose apocalyptic interests it reflects, but the original collection would have inspired the additions. It is plainly indebted to the editors of the *Deuteronomistic History* because the last chapters of *First Isaiah* are copied from *Kings*, and much of its style and interests are like those of the Deuteronomistic Historian—the perpetual theme of apostasy and punishment, obedience to the True God and reward.

The colonists were led to believe that their dedication would be an act in the victory over evil. It looks forward to a period of peace under a just ruler, a barely veiled allusion to the Persian King, though presented as an eschatological saviour. He would bring about a renewal of the world, a new creation free of evil and corruption. The burden of preparing for this task was placed upon Israel who therefore were given an onerous duty but with the promise of the honour and reward that its success would bring. Christians might be right that the Emmanuel “prophecy” was of an eschatological saviour whom God would send to bring about the renewal, but this was the Persian viceroy for God on earth.

## **Second Isaiah**

*Second Isaiah* is the heart of the redactional process (Rendtorff, Williamson)—the original *Isaiah*, to which the other two have been added. The eighth century prophet does not appear in the book after *Isaiah* 39, a problem that Christians resolve by the eighth century prophet’s ability as a clairvoyant. King David is a mythological character invented by the authors of the Deuteronomistic History. He appears ten times in *Isaiah*, nine of them in *First Isaiah*, indicating that it is written by some author with the same interests and precedents. *Second Isaiah* makes one mention of David in its final chapter, but it was probably inserted, because it and the one sentence following it appear out of the blue. An editor added it thinking it was appropriate in a list of the benefits of the New Covenant. Both *Second Isaiah* and *Third Isaiah* were written before David was invented when Cyrus was considered the saviour king of Judah.

The whole of *Isaiah*, in traditional commentaries, is prejudiced by the acceptance of the propaganda that the colonists from Persia were returning Jews. Plainly they were presented in that way but the later interpreters have gone much further than even the originals. *Second Isaiah* seems to be propaganda contemporaneous with the “returners”—the colonists being sent to form the temple state. It instructs the colonists on how to present propaganda to the native Canaanites.

From *Deutero-Isaiah*, G Garbini sees Isaiah as having a religious vision of Yehouah as Ahuramazda, and wanting to spread the idea, but “once again, it remained unheard”. He sees the Iranian consequences as marginal, and more of a “literary legacy than a real ideological adherence”. A professor only of philology might

conclude this, but it is a serious blind spot for someone like Garbini. If he had seriously compared Judaism with Zoroastrianism, and wondered why it should be that the latter explains practices in the former that it does not explain, then the relationship of the two would be undeniable.

The two diverged when Judaism became Hellenized then Rabbinized, and Alexander tried to destroy the Persian religion by torching its holy texts. Zoroastrianism survived by eastern regimes subsequently picking up the pieces but much had been lost forever. Even so, too much is alike in the pieces of each that remain of Judaism and Zoroastrianism, and the fact that the latter has the answers shows it to be primary.

Great civilisations can culturally conquer their conquerors—Babylon was doing it to the Persians when its empire ended—but not insignificant and unpopulated backwaters. Garbini thinks the Jews, a subject people, could act independently of the Persian ministries, saying, “With Xerxes, the Jews detached themselves from the Persian monarchy”, because he was a tyrant who upset them. It seems the Jews joined the Egyptians in rebellions when Xerxes died in 465 BC. The Egyptian princes Inaros and Amyrtaeus were eventually defeated and Inaros was executed in 454 BC, ending the rebellion. Greeks had fought for the Egyptians and the Satrap of Abarnahara, Megabyxos, had promised them safety if they surrendered, which they did, but was then obliged on higher authority to despatch the Greek captives. On a point of honour he refused and fought two victories against his friend Artaxerxes before they agreed a truce.

The Jews would have been involved in either or both of these rebellions, and the despatch of Nehemiah looks to have been the outcome. The intransigence of the Jews in mid-century had forced the hand of Artaxerxes. The king had tried and failed to punish Megabyxos, and seemed to decide a better policy was that an anti-Egyptian buffer had to be set up as soon as feasible in Yehud. Such colonization as had already happened had been ineffective, as the rebellion showed, and Nehemiah was sent to sort the Jewish buffer state out. The city and temple, if they had been restored at all hitherto, were again razed in these wars, but the policy was now to rebuild as quickly as possible. In *Isaiah* 44:28, Jerusalem and the temple are spoken of as newly founded and built by Cyrus. Plainly, Jerusalem had been devastated so thoroughly, that it had to be founded and built anew by the Persian settlers. Pussy-footing ceased and a mass of deportees were obliged to impose the restored worship of Yehouah. Ezra launched the new system about 417 BC in the reign of Darius II. This was when the colonists were sent to take control of the unruly state, and the proper worship of Yehouah was finally instituted by Ezra.

The titles of Yehouah denote him as Ahuramazda. Even Garbini wonders how a subject people can make claims contrary to the ruling people about their god. Both gods could not have been the “god of heaven” without conflict, in this view. The answer is obvious. They could, if they were the same god but simply with a different name. Garbini freely accepts:

If there is one God, He is God of all men. They may call Him by different names but He always remains the same.

Giovanni Garbini

The Persians understood that a universal God did not have to have the same name in every language. They also understood better than worshippers of the Hebrew god for the next 2,500 years that religion was a political policy from the outset.

The Persians “restored” the old religions particularly of people who did not resist them or rebel against them. Those who rebelled had their temples destroyed! The restored religions however were not restored as they had been but how they ought to be, in the Persian view. The Persians did not aim to replace Marduk with Ahuramazda, but they transformed Marduk into Ahuramazda. It seems obvious that this was not an instantaneous policy. It was one which continued throughout the reigns of the kings, although it was always referred to its initiator, Cyrus. Ezra did not impose a Persian law on to the Jews until 100 years after Cyrus, and the imposition was probably because the Jews had assisted either the Egyptians or Megabyzos in rebellion, but Cyrus was nevertheless cited as the initiator of the restoration.

*Ezra* 1:1 mentions the edict of the first year of Cyrus, but it is absurd to imagine that the instant that Cyrus issued an edict of restoration that thousands of Jews returned. It seems that the colonisation of such a poor land was not taken up by many expatriot Jews or anyone else, and eventually, the rebellious Jews were punished by having colonists deported into the land to rule them. Garbini wonders how Isaiah could attack Marduk and Nabu in his book when the Cyrus cylinder praises them. He acknowledges that these are propaganda works but seems not to understand propaganda. Propaganda has a specific audience. Cyrus knew this but not Garbini. If each god being favoured was to be shown as the universal God who favoured the Shah, then all other gods were to be disparaged by the propaganda for that God. So Bel and Nebo would bow before Yehouah in his propaganda, but Yehouah would bow down before Bel in his propaganda.

Isaiah speaks (*Isa* 43:3; 45:14) of the conquest of Egypt, Cush and Saba. This must have been written after the reign of Cambyses when Cyrus was already dead, though Isaiah sounds as if he were alive. Garbini thinks that *Isaiah* 40-48 “reflects precisely the political ideology of Darius”. He therefore dates it to 500 BC, but, as C Herrenschildt, in *Studia Iranica* (1977), has shown, it was Darius the Great and subsequent monarchs of Persia who devised the notion of the Shahanshah as the earthly mirror of the God who created the world. The parallels of *Isaiah* 42:5-7 with *Yasna* 44 of the *Avesta*, and the juxtaposition of Cyrus and God in parallel passages (40:12-32, God; 41:1-5, Cyrus; 41:25-42:7, God; 44:27-45:8, Cyrus) could certainly not have been written until the reign of Darius the Great, but probably not until later in the fifth century. By this time, Cyrus was invariably specified as the originator of the policy whichever Persian king was actually implementing it.

The rebellion of Babylon, put down by Darius, along with other rebellions, appears (*Isa* 47), but Darius did not convert from being a devotee of Marduk back to worshipping Ahuramazda, as the case would have to have been if Cyrus in his cylinders had really taken up Marduk worship. The policy was to restore the gods of nations that co-operated but rebellions were not considered as co-operation. Rebellious people had their temples and gods destroyed. This was no change of policy. Nor was this the Darius under whom the Jewish religion was restored in Yehud, though the biblical authors obviously did not realise there were two kings Darius, and so thought the restoration had happened in the reign of the famous one.

*Second-Isaiah* is really itself two Isaiahs, or is in two acts, one from 40-48 and the other from 49-55. The first is concerned with the time of the return itself and the second with the immediate period of the return. The first mentions Cyrus and Babylon, the second does not. The first appeals to prophecy through history, not the later verses. In the earlier verses, the redeemed community is Jacob-Israel and Israel is explicitly the “servant.” In the later verses, the references are to Jerusalem.

*Isaiah* 40-48 announces Cyrus the Persian as the messiah. Cyrus is Yehouah's choice of earthly regent just as he was Marduk's choice in Babylon. Cyrus's tactic was to set up propagandists in neighbouring countries to persuade them of his future success. He aimed to undermine any spirit of resistance and make people feel they were backing a winner. With the morale of opponents weakened and the will of supporters strengthened, he could choose the appropriate time to act—when the response would be most favourable. The Babylonians offered no resistance to Cyrus when his soldiers got to its gates. Most of the people welcomed the Persian conquerors. His “prophets” had laid the ground and the result was a bloodless victory.

In *Isaiah*, the appeal to the Jews is shown as being contemporary, but it is more likely to be a later king making use of Cyrus's historic pronouncements with the usual intention of giving a historical authority to current decisions. The return is depicted as the gracious act of a merciful God, the same propaganda as that used by the Persians in Babylon. By tying it to the edicts of Cyrus, God is shown as acting in history through the Persian kings as saviours.

In *Second Isaiah* 49-55, the colonists are actually sent to Jerusalem, the year being around 420 BC, and the “return” is shown as a victory for the whole world (*Isa*45:22-23)—which was in practice Abarnahara. Jerusalem is the centre of true revelation, the centre of worship and the witness to God's salvation.

A key concept introduced in *Second Isaiah* is that of the suffering servant. This will have been a personification of the colonists themselves returning as a servant suffering for God (*Isa* 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12) that the final victory be won. However, the odd distribution of these references looks as if they have been inserted later, and they could be specific references to the Essene Righteous Teacher inserted as late as the second century BC.

## **Comfort Ye My People**

*Second Isaiah* is mainly in verse, and the structure of Attic plays suggests *Isaiah* 40-55 is drama with stage instructions. The Greek war against Persia lasted from 492 to 479 BC. Aeschylus's drama, *The Persians*, was already performed in 472—only eight years after the Persians had been defeated at the battle of Salamis. Aeschylus grapples with Persian rule, but there, even from a Greek viewpoint, Cyrus is an ideal ruler as in *Isaiah*. It has a prologue and epilogue, and is divided into separate acts and scenes. The songs of a chorus separate the major units of the *epeisodioi* from one another, an *epeisodion* being that part of the tragedy in its full extent which is played out between the choral interludes, as Aristotle has it. The choral interludes had the practical purpose, because there was no curtain in the ancient theatres, of allowing time for changes of roles and costumes, and allow for time to pass between the different parts of the action. They also explained the action so that the audience did not miss its nuances. There were no stage directions. The place and time of the action, what was happening, and who was speaking, had to be deduced from the text, which therefore contained suitable clues.

*Deutero-Isaiah* seems older even than Attic drama. Compared with Egyptian texts, *Deutero-Isaiah* departs more radically from ritual and its explanation—say, of the cultic vessels or sacrificial ceremonies. A speaker is continually announcing the action. Procession, dance and music fill up the time. The number of the chief performers is small, especially the number of those with speaking parts. Two to three actors suffice. Jacob/Israel (from *Isaiah* 41 onward) and Zion/Jerusalem (from *Isaiah* 48 onward) do not appear simultaneously. The sole

exception is 51:12-16. But there neither Zion/Jerusalem nor Jacob/Israel is called by name. They are a nameless pair who do not themselves speak. So they could have been played by non-speaking stand-ins or trinees. Cyrus and Babylon do not meet either.

It begins with the narrator saying God commanded some unspecified group, the imperative being plural, of devotees to comfort “His people.”

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

The people being thus commanded, according to Christian commentators are the “exiles” in Babylon, but who then are “my people?” Piety demands that the exiles should comfort themselves, but the problem is solved if the people being instructed are the Yehouist colonists being sent to Jerusalem to set up the temple state. “My people” are the people who would thus be comforted, the people of the Persian satrapy of Abarnahara. The colonists are being transported to Jerusalem and are told:

Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of Yehouah’s hand double for all her sins.

The *exile* has been twice what it was meant to be. The first instruction to the colonists is to tell the locals that they have been forgiven for their previous sins! This was at first and remained the prime propaganda to the people of the temple state—they had been sinners and had been punished by Yehouah for it. The implied threat is that they would be punished again, if they reverted to their bad practices, but would be treated comfortably if they were obedient to God.

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Yehouah, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of Yehouah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of Yehouah hath spoken it.

The beginning is the passage quoted wrongly, in the Christian *New Testament*, applied to John the Baptist, a typical Essenic variant reading applied by Christians. The grandiose promises here mean that the setting up of the temple state is an eschatological act that will help to reveal God and bring about the restoration of the world. The levelling of hills and filling of dales all pertain to the eschaton, proved by the promise of a theophany, which is instantaneous because it is seen simultaneously by all living creatures. These colonists were being given a role in salvation.

The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of Yehouah bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

This seems also to be part of the eschatological explanation, but its presentation suggests a call and response liturgy. Here the colonists are speaking in answer to the prophet/priest earlier. The acknowledgement is that human beings are like grass and so any one might not see the revelation at the end. The “word” mentioned



here seems to bracket with the earlier “wilderness” which has the same root. In the wilderness the vegetation withers and fades but the metaphorical word of Yehouah does not. Wilderness therefore seems to stand for the material corrupt world which will end in God’s Judgement.

O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

The message they are meant to convey is that they should see and accept the “good tidings” of their God as Yehouah, a new god to the natives of the Canaanite hills of Palestine.

Behold, the Lord God (really, “Behold your God, Behold my Lord Yehouah”) will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

The proper doublet distinguishes the imposed god from the Lord of the imposers. Naturally, it was the same god, but the relationship would be different. The colonists were an elite class while the natives were to be converts to the new religion. The work was before Him and His agents temporally, and the “reward” is the reward the ruling colonists would receive when they had completed God’s work. Riches were therefore regarded as a reward of God in Judaism.

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

The poem concludes with a homely metaphor assuring the colonists that they would be carefully looked after like a shepherd watching over his flock. This too was to be a lasting metaphor in Judaism and Christianity. Arguably, some of the verses have been misplaced, but the overall sense remains. The colonists had a job to do and would be cared for and rewarded for doing it.

Can other biblical writings be understood as “dramas” or a basis for a dramatization? It has to be seriously considered, for worship in Greek culture was dramatized often. The same might be true also of Mesopotamia, where dramatized programmes might have accompanied liturgies and processions. It has been long suggested that the Passion of Christ is a religious drama misunderstood by gentile observers who ran off and, taking it seriously, started Christianity.

### **Third Isaiah**

In *Third Isaiah*, Jerusalem is in ruins (60:10) but the temple is built (56:7), and the Jews are interested in proselytizing (56:3-5). It must be meant to be after the time when Ezra returned, and the temple state was set up for all the nations of Abarnahara.

The one theme that unites the *Isaiah* books above all is that of the covenant. *Second and Third Isaiah* are dealing with a covenant that the people had to accept to be saved, and it appears thus four times in *Second Isaiah* and five times in *Third Isaiah*. *First Isaiah* is based on the premise that the covenant has been broken, and in two of the four places it mentions the word “covenant”, it is a “covenant of death” that the people have

entered, while, in the other two passages, it is a “broken covenant.” It is plain then that *First Isaiah* is really *Last Isaiah*, being a later and more refined composition by the Deuteronomic Historian and later editors, highlighting the fact that the people had quickly neglected their duty to obey the covenant, while the utterances of the historic Isaiahs of the time of the Persian colonization were left relatively untouched.

The covenant is, of course, the vassalage treaty that Persia imposed on the state of Yehud by Ezra. These prophets will have preceded Ezra but knew that any vassal state would have to obey such a treaty and that it would be presented as God’s not the king’s—but the king acted for God! In the Jewish scriptures, God is synonymous with the Persian Shahanshah. The people were meant to understand Persian law as God’s law.

## Zion

Isaiah is fond of using the word, “harab”, using it twelve times of the 37 times it occurs in the scriptures. The verb “harab” originally meant “to be dry.” From this, it also came to mean “to be waste.” Especially in the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, the word “harab” denotes desolation and ruin. Horba is the noun meaning waste or desolate places (in *Isaiah* 48:21, “horba” means “deserts”) or ruins: Yehouah who will raise up the ruins of Jerusalem (44:26); their desolate places will one day be too limited for the increased population (49:19); Yehouah will comfort Zion’s waste places and transform them into an Eden (51:3); Jerusalem’s ruins will break forth into singing (52:9), as they will be rebuilt (58:12; 61:4).

Nehemiah (c 445 BC) learns that Jerusalem is still in ruins (*Neh* 2:3, 17), and Ezra thanks God for permitting the Jews to repair the temple’s ruins (*Ezra* 9:9). When the Jews’ dedication to rebuilding the temple flagged, the Haggai rebuked them with a play on words, proclaiming that because Yehouah’s house had remained “desolate” (“hareb”, *Hag* 1:4,9) Yehouah would bring a “drought” (“horeb”, *Hag* 1:11) upon the land. *Jeremiah* 33:10 promises that in the desolate place “without man or inhabitant or beast” voices of gladness would be heard once more.

Now curiously, Horeb, meaning dryness, drought, heat, desolation, because it was desolate, is an alternative name for Mount Sinai, the mountain of God, appearing 17 times in the bible, no less than nine of them are in *Deuteronomy*. In the hypothesis on these pages, Horeb was the original word used of the dry hilltop used as a High Place for worshipping Yehouah before the colonization. Horeb is Zion, which means the same. Zion means a dry and solitary but prominent place. These were the conditions described of the place where the temple was built. More happens at Horeb than we now know about (*Deut* 4:10; 9:8; 18:16). Moses struck the rock in Horeb (*Ex* 17:6), but not on Mount Sinai which the Israelites did not reach until later (*Ex* 19:1). The Israelites made a calf at Horeb (*Psalms* 106:19). When Solomon installed the ark, it contained only the two tables of stone which Moses placed in it at Horeb (*1 Kg* 8:9; *2 Chr* 5:10).

Horeb is Zion, and the priests changed Zion to Sinai when they invented the myth of the desert wanderings. Zion is never used by any biblical author in a book that uses Sinai. Sinai appears in *Deuteronomy*, but only once in the song of Moses which is plainly an addition by the priestly school that invented the myth of the Exodus. Horeb appears three times in *Exodus* (*Ex* 3:1; 17:6; 33:6), but otherwise Sinai is used (13 times), and Sinai is used exclusively in the priestly book, *Leviticus*.

In the myth of David, the king bought a threshing floor from the Jebusite Araunah (Ornan), at the highest

elevation of the plateau. Threshing floors were often places of worship in the ancient near east, and were preferably dry places. Araunah's threshing floor was plainly a High Place, an open air sanctuary. This is the place where David chose to put the Ark of the Covenant and his son, Solomon, built the temple, in the legend. The place was called Mount Zion, the home of Yehouah and therefore the mountain of God. L M Luker in *Lutterworth's Dictionary of the Bible*, comments:

In a sense then, Yehouah moved his mountain abode from Sinai to Zion.

Sinai was never, in fact, anything other than a mythicized Mount Zion. It was a Canaanite High Place, then, early in the Persian period, a Persian style open air sanctuary, and finally Darius II built a treasury there in the form of a traditional enclosed temple in a fortified city. The priests writing the myth of Moses, under the sponsorship of the Egyptian Ptolemies, transposed Zion a millennium back in history to become Sinai where God appeared to Moses and gave him the law.

## Jeremiah

Jeremiah is a confused book but has a consistent theme, that of decrying the people for being apostates and warning them to change their ways from worshipping Canaanite Gods. The book is set towards the end of the kingdom of Judah. Good king Hezekiah (714-686 BC) had been succeeded by bad king Manasseh (686-641 BC) who is supposed to have brought back the Canaanite deities outlawed getting on for a millennium before by Moses. Despite Manasseh's apostasy, good king Josiah (639-609 BC) had followed on, but apparently God was not appeased by the good deeds of the good kings and destroyed Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians anyway (586 BC).

The name Josiah is a variant of Joshua and he is supposed to have found a hidden book of the law, assumed to have been *Deuteronomy*, and put it into effect. Josiah is offered as a king who is a saviour, whence Josiah, but he was not a saviour because Jerusalem was ruined. He has the name because he was presented as the one who discovered the law and first put it into effect. The Persians under Ezra really introduced the law (*Deuteronomy*) based on Zoroastrian law and imperial needs, but to give it credibility, the Persians used their ruse of telling the people that the law was their own law and had been implemented by Josiah 200 years before. Who could dispute it? Under this law, all native and foreign cults were suppressed in favour of that of Yehouah, and every shrine other than the temple closed. No such law could have been Canaanitish. It was a Persian law and so could not have been a law of Josiah 200 years before. That is propaganda to persuade the people to accept as their own an unpopular law.

Jeremiah was writing after the tribes of the Medes had been united as a nation, and knows that the king of the Medes plotted against Babylon:

Make bright the arrows. Gather the shields. Yehouah hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, for his device is against Babylon, to destroy it, because it is the vengeance of Yehouah, the vengeance of his temple.

*Jeremiah 51:11*

The message of Jeremiah is that the people have not properly taken the religious and social changes to heart.

They have adopted them superficially and insincerely. Yehud had therefore already been colonized but the changes were not being fully accepted. Jeremiah is shown as being unpopular himself for delivering this message and as deciding to write rather than preach, but king Jehoiakim derides his written work too. It is easy to see that Jeremiah was unpopular—he criticized everyone in society, kings, nobles, priests and the apostate people.

Effectively, *Jeremiah* is justification for the colonists, supposed to be Jewish “exiles”, taking over the country. The “returners” would set up a regenerated country over which a Davidic king would reign—an interpolation alluding to the eschatological role of the temple state. The ungrateful people reject him and he dies in Egypt.

His real significance is in formulating the idea of a “New Covenant” (31:31-34). According to the later biblical myth, the original covenant was that of Moses in about 1300 BC, but Moses was really Ezra in about 400 BC, the law he presented being misunderstood as the law of Moses, from the failure of the Canaanite people to understand properly the word, Ahuramazda, taking it to be “Torah Moshe.” Jeremiah is a little later, in fact, because the people have not accepted the reforms and he urges them to put the covenant in their hearts. He urges a personal commitment rather than formal sacerdotalism, putting him close to the later Hasidim or Essenes than to the temple priesthood. Whether this is the result of editing, it is impossible to say.

## Ezekiel

Ezekiel is presented as a priest sent into exile before the destruction of Jerusalem. Ezekiel’s book seems to be a single work of a single author, but a closer look betrays some seams. Certainly *Ezekiel* has been meticulously edited to give it a complete and polished look, uncharacteristic of some of the other scriptural works.

Ezekiel is offered as the Jewish equivalent of Zoroaster, both having a startling vision of God to set them on the road to prophecy. The first half of the book contains warnings to Jerusalem then follows warnings to other nations and finally from chapters 33 to 48 are set out how the temple city of Jerusalem was intended to be, including detailed specifications for the architecture of the proposed temple.

*Ezekiel* 14:14 mentions *Job* and king David, so it must be later than these late constructs. Such a highly polished book is likely to be late and C C Torrey, judging from language and historical allusions, thought it was written about 230 BC. This is the time of the Egyptian Greek rulers, the Ptolemies, who began by being favourable to the Jerusalem cult. It is likely that in this period the priests developed the detail of the sacerdotal practice of the temple, and introduced more and more reasons for offering sacrifices to keep themselves in their comfortable work. Most of the *Pentateuch* will have been written at this time for the Ptolemies to keep in their new library at Alexandria.

The concerns of *Ezekiel* could have placed it at the time of the Persian colonists, but much of the detail shows the interests of later priests, those that devised the Priestly Codes. It might be that there is a prophet of the fifth century at the centre of *Ezekiel*, but he seems to be overlaid thickly with later material and plenty of polish! Thus the design of the temple in *Ezekiel* might have been overelaborated by the third century priests who saw it as an ideal or heavenly temple, but they might have had an original specification sent with the returners. The hold ups and delays, that *Ezra*, *Nehemiah*, *Haggai* and *Zechariah* speak of, perhaps necessitated a more utilitarian design and the specification came to be seen as an ideal, then got even more idealized in the copying.

*Ezekiel* is written mainly in prose unlike the other major prophets. Perhaps for that reason, he does not use the word "Zion" for Jerusalem. Most of the poetic prophets and the *Psalms* use it considerably, though it hardly appears otherwise in the scriptures. Ezekiel, however, is also unusual compared with his supposed contemporary, Jeremiah, for example in not being interested in Jerusalem and Judah compared with Israel. Since the Persians were intent on setting up the temple state of Yehud, Ezekiel must have shown that in his work, but he uses "Israel" almost exclusively.

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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 5. Persian Propaganda**  
**The Psalms as Propaganda**

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## **Christian Worship**

Catholics are under obligation to attend “mass” every Sunday. Though there is supposedly but one God, the observer will see side chapels to other entities, and since idolatry is forbidden in the worship of Yehouah, the casual observer might be surprised to find the church full of statues of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Sacred Heart and various saints. Further revered images are of the fourteen stations of the cross and there will be seven candles on the altar illuminating an image of a man being crucified on a cross.

The trappings are not our concern here, however, but the service itself. These are the main elements in the order of the service.

- ☐ The congregation stands as the priest enters with his attendants, and sing a hymn.
- ☐ Sins are confessed and absolved.
- ☐ The congregation stand and sing prescribed hymns and the attendant chants some passages from the bible and a creed.
- ☐ The priest gives an exhortation called a sermon.
- ☐ The Missal book is moved to the side of the altar.
- ☐ The centre of the ceremony is the preparation and presentation of the wafer biscuits which are the “body of Christ”, and are accepted by all who wish to have “communion”.
- ☐ The congregation are then dismissed, feeling better for it all

Rituals like these might be expected to evolve and these naturally have done, as can be seen by the differences between the different churches, notably the Orthodox and the Protestant, but they are recognisably the same still. The consecration of wine and wafers plainly comes from the commendation of Jesus at the Last Supper in the mythology of Christianity, and in fact from the effort of Paul to have his converts treat the service with solemnity rather than as a booze-up. With the significance it has, it is Christian, although most religious services involve some sort of sacred repast, however symbolic. What then of the general outline? Is it Jewish or Pagan?

## **A Worshipping Church**

Parts of what seems like liturgy have been found throughout the *New Testament*, giving the impression that the early church already was a worshipping church—Bousset and Bultmann held this view. It is further evidence that the church was continuing a tradition and not inventing new practices to commemorate a recent revelation. Much of the *New Testament* reflects, not so much the activities of the apostles, but the activities of the developing church. These are retrojected into the time of the gospels and *Acts*. Exactly the same happened with the *Old Testament*.

If the earliest Christian churches already had a liturgy, then it must have been Jewish originally, and that means



Essene, though doubtless the Sadducees who were made redundant in 70 AD and found an alternative occupation in the new gentile church would have brought in some of their own practices. The origins of Christian services must therefore lie in the practices of the Jewish temple, and they were prescribed in the *Old Testament*. In *Leviticus* 23:2-3, “the Lord” required that His people gather together and worship Him every sabbath.

When James delivered his speech at the council of Jerusalem, he noted that “Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath”, (*Acts* 15:21). Josephus (*Against Apion*) says that Moses ordained “that every week men should desert their other occupations and assemble to listen to the Law and to obtain a thorough and accurate knowledge of it”. But nowhere in the laws of Moses in the *Pentateuch* is there direction concerning rituals and their function in worship.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

1 Cor 3:16-17

Here, Paul calls the church itself a “temple of God” in which the Spirit of God dwells—the “ye”, of course, being plural, referring to the congregation as a whole, not individual members. This is the Essene understanding transferred to the Christian church. The Essenes considered the temple as polluted by Pagan (Greek) practices under the Sadducees and withdrew their full support from it. Monastic Essenes withdrew entirely, it seems, but village Essenes attended merely to fulfil their obligations. Both considered that the spirit of God rested on people, provided that they were righteous, and it is this understanding that came through to Christianity.

Essenes therefore, and the Christians that followed them, undertook their rituals to God in their own assemblies, respectively synagogues and churches—the gentiles rejecting the name synagogue as too associated with Essenes and adopting an alternative Greek word for assembly. But nowhere in contemporary sources is there a proper description of a worship service in the synagogue in the first century. The closest are the descriptions in *Luke* 4:16ff and *Acts* 13:14ff. The *Mishnah* gives more about certain elements of the liturgy, but even there a complete description of the liturgy itself is lacking.

*Hebrews* 12:22-24 connects the worship of the Christian church directly to the heavenly temple service, but one in which Jesus Christ is high priest. The christian believers gathered in worship are spiritually present and engaging in the temple worship of heaven. This suggests that the earliest Christian services were reflecting the older services of the Jewish temple and perhaps confirms Sadducaean influence on the gentile church, though it might simply be the Essenes thread of the people being God’s temple, arising once more.

## **The Foundation of the Jewish Priesthood**

The contention in these pages is that Judaism was founded by the Persians from Cyrus the Great on, and we find the supposed Jewish priest with the Persian name, Ezra, saying (*Ezra* 6:18) “they appointed the priests to their divisions and the Levites in their orders for the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses”, implying that David’s divisions for the priests and Levites goes back to the laws of Moses. Indeed, it does because Ezra had just written the laws of Moses and was to read them to the people in the very first service of the Jewish religion! Moses was Mazda!

In *1 Chronicles* 23-26 we are given a detailed description of the functions and divisions of the priests and Levites. This is precisely the information we are lacking in the *Pentateuch*. Schematically the organisation is:

- ❑ In chapter 23:1-5—Division of Levites. There were 38,000 Levites of whom 24,000 were to oversee the work of the house of the LORD, 6,000 were officers and judges, 4,000 were gatekeepers, and 4,000 were “praisers” of Yehouah with the instruments “David” made for praising.
- ❑ In chapter 23:6-23—major family households of Levites.
- ❑ In chapter 23:28-32—summary of various duties of Levites.
- ❑ In chapter 23:30-31—the duty of the 4,000 “praisers” is standing every morning and evening to confess and to praise.
- ❑ In chapter 24—division of 24 courses of priests.
- ❑ In chapter 25—division of 24 courses of “praisers”.
- ❑ In chapter 26—gatekeepers, treasurers, et al.

The role of a nabi (prophet) or chozeh (seer) was firstly as a spokesman of God, but it also meant an inspired teacher of the law (*Dt* 18:15-22; *2 Kg* 17:13; *Isa* 8:16f; *Ps* 78:1ff). In short, prophets were officials given the duty of ensuring that the law and the new disciplines were understood and properly practiced by the people. Prophets were propagandists for the new regime.

The people of Israel were divided into 24 courses (in line with the priests) and representatives were present to watch the offerings in Jerusalem, whilst the others gathered in their local towns. But this would mean a gathering only around one particular town at any given week in which a particular course of priests served. The *Mishnah* implies that this tradition goes back to the “first prophets”.

## The Public Reading of the Law

When a new Judah emerged after the razing of Jerusalem in 587 BC, it was identified with exclusive adoration of Yehouah, the creator of heaven and earth and supreme king over all nations, with emphasis on temple, *Torah*, sabbath, a holy land and its people elected by Yehouah. Erhard S Gerstenberger (*Theologies in the Book of Psalms*) says the *Psalter* is a treasury of Jewish theologies of the time of this time—the Persian colonization of Yehud (conventionally called “the Return”).

In the context of congregational worship, and with an emphasis on a supplied salvation history (*Ps* 78; 105; 106; 136) and on *Torah*, as the sources of Jewish identity, as well as homilies and teachings, Yehouah appears in *Psalms* as the supreme God, creator and maintainer of world order, but also the exclusive Lord of His religious community and the teacher, comforter and provider of every Jew. Temple rituals showed God like Mithras who was conceived as the face of God—the sun on high amid the hosts of heaven:

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.  
Who is the King of glory? Yehouah, strong and mighty, Yehouah, mighty in battle.  
Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.  
Who is this King of glory? Yehouah of hosts, he is the King of glory.

*Ps* 24:7-10

A partial description of a worship service comes to us from the same time as Ezra (*Neh* 8:1-12) as the corporate worship on the first day of the month (new moon's day, an extra sabbath day) in the temple. Elements mentioned are:

- ☐ The High Priest brings out the book of the law.
- ☐ The office bearers ascend the podium.
- ☐ The book of God's Word is formally opened in the sight of all.
- ☐ The congregation stands, as soon as the book is opened.
- ☐ The High Priest blessed God, in this context, doubtless for His gift of His law—and, to judge by the response of the congregation, admonished the people to obey it.
- ☐ The congregation responds with a communal "amen", meaning "so be it"—submission! They submit to the law about to be read.
- ☐ The congregation "lifted up their hands" and "bowed their heads with faces to the ground", in Moslem fashion, to "worship" God,
- ☐ The High Priest then read the law in a language the people could not understand, but a team of assistants and Levites made sure the congregation understood it.
- ☐ The people mourned and wept at the reading of the law and the Levites told them firmly to "be quiet", "not be grieved" and not to "mourn or weep!"
- ☐ The congregation go and eat and drink and offer portions to the hungry.

In the account, these people were hardly joyous at the rules being read out to them, and they had to be forced by the Levites to go and rejoice. Jews and Christians tell us they were crying for joy! The new order of things was being forced on to the reluctant Canaanites and they were distressed, not joyous, and that is plain. The point, though, is that this procedure was the procedure laid down for the periodic repetition of the covenant law to the subject Canaanites, and therefore became the basis of temple ritual and subsequently Christian liturgy.

### **Psalms as Persian Propaganda**

Even more significant is that the propaganda was evidently not merely the reading of the law "of Moses" but that it was also embodied in the psalms being sung or chanted by the cantors. *Torah* implies salvation, grace and general satisfaction or happiness (*shalom*, *Ps* 1), and it reflects cosmic order (Persian, Arta):

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.

*Ps* 19:1

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy.

*Ps* 19:4-5

The Law of Yehouah is perfect, converting the soul. The Testimony of Jehovah is sure, making the simple wise.

The precepts of Jehovah are right, rejoicing the heart. The commands of Jehovah are pure, giving light to the eyes.

*Ps* 19:7-8

Prophets were officials who ensured the law was understood, and the singers also had a prophetic role! Mowinckel noted the existence of many psalms containing prophecy—direct revelation from Yehouah—meant for the audience of subject people being indoctrinated. These psalms were recited by a temple priest or singer just as Gunkel had argued.

The psalmist often speaks in the name of God (*Ps* 2:6ff; 12:6; 20:7; 28:5; 32:8f; 36:2; 49; 50; 60:8-10; 75:3ff; 81:7ff; 82; 85:9; 95:7ff; 110; etc), thereby speaking prophesy in the sense of speaking for God. *1 Chronicles* 25:2f calls the work of the temple singers “prophesying”. Thus the singing of songs in the systems of worship set up to Yehouah were ways of indoctrinating the people with the newly imposed principles in the guise of honour to God:

Blessed are you, O Yehouah. Teach me your statutes.  
With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth.

*Ps* 119:12

The vocabulary of the new type of worship—teaching, making the people understand, opening their eyes, obeying the law—is prominent in the whole of *Psalms*. The later tradition, after the defeat of the Persians, was that the gift of prophecy among the singers ceased from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. It is certainly expressed by the second century BC (*1 Macc* 4:46; 9:27; 14:41), and the Levitical cantors are no longer thought of as “prophets”. *Sirach* 50:1-24 is a eulogy of the high priest Simon II, whom we know held office in 198 BC. He describes (v 8) a temple service and mentions the use of the singers. Those who had imposed the system had been swept away by Alexander, but Yehouism did not cease. It had set down deep enough roots to survive.

Josephus, in 64 AD, says that the Levitical singers asked to be allowed to learn the songs by heart (*Ant* 20.216-18), showing that beforehand the tradition was that they had to be read—a tradition that began when they were reading out new laws or lessons, but which by then had petrified into the same ones repeated, the reason for the reading of new ones having ceased.

Gerstenberger thought the Judaeans themselves claimed the absolute sovereignty of Yehouah over all the earth (*Ps* 24,1), in consonance with the universalistic world views of the Babylonian and Persian cultures and in defence against being spiritually subdued by the ruling powers. In other words, he thinks they adapted Yehouah to the Persian concepts of God (Ahuramazda) voluntarily, just to copy the world powers. Yet, he compares, in a note only, the voluntary innovations with the followers of Zoroaster in ancient Persia, who already formed similar communities of faith transcending family ties, according to Mary Boyce. It was not coincidental that this huge change happened in Judah just when the Persians had control over it, nor was it a voluntary change. It was a result of Persian colonial policy.

## **The Books of Psalms**

*Psalms* 80 was sung in the temple as is clear both from its authorship (the Levitical prophet, Asaph), and from the address to God as the one “who is enthroned between the cherubim”, a clear indication of God enthroned upon the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies. The Psalter is divided into five books, as the Masoretic bible and the Septuagint verify, as well as internal signs in the Psalter itself. Thus each book ends with an appropriate

doxology (*Ps* 41:14; 72:18-19; 89:53; 106:48). *Psalms* 150, or 146-50, is the doxology for book 5.

The line underneath the doxology to book 2 (*Ps* 72:20) “the hymns of David, son of Jesse are ended”, is at the end of a psalm of Solomon! But it seems to mean that the first two books of psalms, taken to have been composed by David, completed the collection. Yet so-called Davidic psalms occur in the remaining books. It might confirm the first two as the earliest collection, but then songwriters added further songs to the list claiming that some were by David as well. None of course are actually by David (or Solomon) but were written much later.

Book 3 seems not to contain any earlier collection. *Psalms* 89 shows that a date this book as a whole was composed sometime after the exile, and so in the Persian period.

Books 4 and 5 show signs that they might have been compiled together at a later date. *Psalms* 137 shows the date was after the exile, and *Psalms* 126 seems to refer to the “Return”. A Persian provenance is also confirmed by the distinction between books 1-3 and 4-5 in the manuscript tradition. Scholars are happy to associate these books with the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, while innocently claiming that the presence of “Davidic” psalms in books after the first two shows that Davidic psalms were being found “preserved” from the time of David, 500 years before!

Also highly indicative is the name of God used in the different collections.

- ❑ Yehouah is God’s name 273 times in book 1, as opposed to Elohim appearing 15 times.
- ❑ Elohim is used 164 times in book 2 as opposed to Yehouah 30 times.
- ❑ In book 3, psalms 73 to 83 use Elohim mainly but others in the collection prefer Yehouah.
- ❑ The most recent books, 4 and 5, use Yehouah 236 times, with Elohim not used at all in book 4, and used only 7 times in book 5.

Plainly, although books 1 and 2 were composed at the same time, they were separate collections for separate congregations. This might be taken by biblicists as evidence of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, but it is more likely to be evidence of two cults, one of Elohim and one of Yehouah, who struggled for supremacy. In several cases, the psalms in book 1 and book 2 seem related, but with appropriate changes made to accomodate each respective cult. *Psalms* 14 of book 1 is similar to *Psalms* 53 of book 2. The same psalm is being used in two contexts. Each psalm addresses God with a different name, and the differences are reworking not textual corruption.

*Psalms* 70 is related to *Psalms* 40:14-18. Part of a psalm has been used in different settings. The same is true of *Psalms* 31:2-4a and *Psalms* 71:1-3. *Psalms* 108 is similar to *Psalms* 57:8-12 and *Psalms* 60:7-14. David was evidently writing psalms for two sets of worshippers—all of these are supposed to have been by David.

## **Psalms at Qumran**

The arrangements of the psalms found at Qumran are astonishingly revealing. They prove that the *Psalter*, supposedly written by king David about 1000 BC, was not finished even as late as the first century AD. Had David himself resurrected to complete his efforts?

Of the five books of psalms in the Jewish scriptures, judging by the copies found in the Qumran caves, only three had been substantially agreed by the first century BC. The last two books were arranged in quite different ways (*11QPs*) from the extant versions in our bibles. The fact that several copies of the same work have been found shows that these were accepted arrangements by the sectaries, at least, and not just an idiosyncratic anthology of psalms, but they were not the finally accepted collections.

This is clear evidence that an important part of the supposedly ancient Jewish scriptures had not been compiled or probably even written by the first century BC. Nothing could be more suggestive that the Jewish scriptures as a whole are far more recent than the average Jewish and Christian punter thinks, and that the Jewish and Christian church leaders and scholars will admit to the general public.



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**PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM**  
**Book 5. Persian Propaganda**  
**The Enoch Literature; Was Enoch Zoroaster?**

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## Enoch

Enoch is a non-canonical book of Jewish scriptures used by the first Christians and much treasured by the sectaries of Qumran who kept multiple copies. It is cited in the *New Testament* at *Jude* 5:14 and referred to indirectly at *2 Peter* 2. Over a hundred phrases in the *New Testament* can be traced to the *1 Enoch*. Plainly, though, there came a time when the church thought the idea of fallen angels was dangerous, and Filastrius declared it heretical in his *Book of Heresies*. Nor did the rabbis like the book's teaching about corrupt angels. As early as the second century AD, Rabbi Simeon ben Jochai cursed those who believed the Enoch works, suggesting that it was seen as a stimulation to revolutionaries like Jesus and Bar Kosiba.

We get used to our conventional ways of representing biblical names but there are often different ways of writing them because of the problems of deciding on the correct vowel sounds and because some Semitic consonants have no equivalent in English. So with Enoch, alternatives are Henoch (Josephus) and Chanoc (Philo), which show that the name did not begin with a vowel and it might have been almost like our "k".

Enoch has little role in our bible, but was a far more important man than we now imagine. Biblicly, he was the son of Cain (Gen 4:17), and therefore the third after Adam, and he built a city named after him. Or he was the seventh after Adam (Jude 5:14; 1 Enoch 60:8). Seven is the complete or perfect number obtained from the merging of heaven (3) and earth (4), so Enoch is the perfect man—the man at the boundary of heaven. Irenaeus describes him as "a man raised to heaven by pleasing God while angels fell to earth by transgression." Only Noah and apparently Abraham besides Enoch walked with the gods (Gen 6:9; 17:1).

The city he built, like much of his legend, is not developed in the Jewish scriptures but is said by some to have been Annuchta in Elam, a possibility that suggests a Persian connexion. Annakos, the eponymous founder of Annakos in Phrygian Iconium, lived 300 years and prophesied Deucalion's flood. If this is Enoch, the legend might have come into Palestine with Syrian colonists.

After the birth of Methuselah, his eldest son at 65 years of age:

Enoch walked with the gods (Elohim, always mistranslated as God) 300 years... and he was not, for the gods (Elohim) took him.

(Gen 5:22-24)

Enoch had lived another 300 years, making 365. This suggests that Enoch represented an ideal year—he was perfect because he represented the expectations of a new year and so he was the Spirit of the New Year. The new year festival held at Easter was most important to Persians, and gave rise to the Jewish Festival of Lots (Purim). To judge by this story, the Old Year, standing for the reality of the wickedness of the world infested by the Evil Spirit's demons, was crucified to put an end to it. Celestially, it was the spring equinox when the sun

crossed the celestial equator making a notional cross in the sky.

Enoch as the ideal year would not of course see death. It would be the year in which Ahuramazda was victorious over the Evil Spirit and time would stop so that those who lived, or were resurrected, the righteous, lived forever. Only wicked years saw death. The novelty of Jesus as an Enochian figure was that he seemed to see death on the cross as an atonement for human sin, but was then resurrected into timeless life. He was thus seen as the ultimate Saoshyant or Saviour in Zoroastrian religious terms. Enoch appears in the epistle to the Hebrews as proof of a man who “by faith was translated that he should not see death for he pleased God.” Enoch and Elijah, in Christian tradition, were the two “witnesses” (Rev 11:3) as men who had not died. *1 Enoch* 12:2:

And his activities had to do with the Watchers, and his days were with the holy ones.

Another Enoch in the scriptures is the third son of Midian, a son of Abraham. Midian is an allegorical name of Media, suggesting that the author was suggesting Enoch came out of Persia. Yet another Enoch, the eldest son of Reuben, founded the family of the Hanochites.

## 1 Enoch

Early Christians used non-biblical Jewish literature as well as the scriptures. Before their discovery at Qumran, Jewish works like *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* were known only in the versions transmitted in Christian communities. Early Christian writers often cite passages from these non-canonical works.

The Ethiopic and Slavonic books of Enoch discovered in 1821 and 1880 are called 1 Enoch and 2 Enoch. Several copies of the *Book of Enoch*, have also been found at Qumran. In Victorian times scholars had no doubt that the book was a unity, though Lücke and Hilgerfeld both recognized the *Similitudes* as later. The *Similitudes* were surely later, because they were Christian additions, and so the book of Enoch was not a unity! The Victorians also thought the work was from Hasmonaean times, but now it is known mainly to be earlier. Though nothing appears of it in the scriptures, in legend, Enoch was so remarkable that he filled, according to Slavonic Enoch, 360 books with revelations and invented all the skills that benefit sages—writing, arithmetic and astronomy. He seems to be a Hebrew version of Orpheus or Zoroaster. To judge from the datings from Qumran *1 Enoch* is at least third century BC, but it plainly has its roots in Zoroastrianism.

Western scholars tried to relate the citations from ancient works to 1 or 2 Enoch but had only limited success. Many of the citations did not correspond to anything in either 1 or 2 Enoch. Plainly, 1 and 2 Enoch were only a portion of all the Enoch books that once circulated throughout the Near East. Citations and allusions to “books” or “apocalypses” of Enoch abound in Jewish, Christian and Moslem works, such as Al Tabari, suggesting that an extensive “Enochian” apocalyptic literature existed around his name.

1 Enoch has the following curious features:

- ☐ It has no scriptural quotations except for the song of the angels, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” (Isa 6:3) if this can be claimed as a quotation.
- ☐ It has no suggestions of an advanced temple cult, extensive priesthood, or commitment to a sacrificial religion.

- ❑ The law of Moses is not central to the apparent belief system of the people who wrote the Enochian literature.

These features suggest that *1 Enoch* is independent of Jewish tradition or opposed to it. *1 Enoch* disapproves of the changes made by the “Returners of Babylon” who were seen as polluted apostates (1 Enoch 89:73; 93:9). Margaret Barker (*The Lost Prophet*) writes:

The Enochic version of the history of the return from Babylon makes it clear that the returned exiles were innovators whose ways were not acceptable. By implication, the Enoch group preserved older ways.

The origin of the school of belief in *1 Enoch* might have preceded the announcement of the law of Moses by Ezra. Yet it is strongly eschatological and depicts Enoch as a wise man, a scribe and a priest who interceded with God on behalf of the fallen angels, and presided over the Book of Life at the Last Judgement.

This all could mean that the original returners from exile, those who took advantage of Cyrus’s decree to return voluntarily, objected to the conscripted returners who came later with Ezra. These earlier returners would have been no less conditioned by the Persian administrators to conform to Persian norms of belief and behaviour, but there were few of them and they will have looked back to whatever degree they could to the Israel of the kings for the few centuries that it existed. They are the group who perhaps took the Persian idea of the Saoshyant and saw him as a supernatural king, thus beginning the belief in a messiah. The present books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* have completely blocked them out, unless it is to depict them as being among the Am ha Eretz at the time of Nehemiah and Ezra.

In trying to see behind the bible we are like geologists looking at the strata of the earth that have often been overlaid with new material, folded and compressed, melted together or completely eroded away. Contrary to the utter brainlessness of those who refuse to see it as anything other than perfect, it is self-evidently a complex geology of many different traditions and fragments as well as later, more complete material all assembled together, edited, added to and taken from. Beginning in the Persian period, the Persian administrators gave the colonists a history based on the Assyrian records of Abarnahara. Then Greek and Maccabaeian layers were added while each time parts of the earlier tradition was subtracted or edited. Since the books were all separate, the editing was far from consistent, and only at certain times such as the Ptolemaic period was it possible to attempt any consistent editing. So it was that the Priestly interpolations were made to the earlier books. From this modern scholars, if they are scholars and not biblical apologists, have to find genuine history.

External sources like the Enochian literature can help us to see some of the directions from which the biblical traditions have arrived. A partly erased tradition exists in books like *Jubilees*, which is a version of *Genesis*, the *Assumption of Moses*, the *Testament of Judah* and parts of *Daniel*. It depicts the last judgement as a trial before the throne of God and the struggle of two spirits, one Good and one Wicked, described as angels or princes. A relic of this appears in *Jude* 1:9 where the archangel Michael contends with the Devil over the body of Moses. The erased tradition has a book that is opened to permit the wicked to be judged and punished. The righteous are called the wise and are rewarded by eternal life among the fixed stars of heaven, observing below the wicked being judged and cooked in the fiery pit.

## **The Book of the Watchers**

The first book in *1 Enoch* has been called the *Book of the Watchers*. It follows the brief introduction in chapters 1-5, beginning in chapter 6-16 with an account of the fall of the angels, and the judgement to be made on them and their offspring, the giants. The account in *Genesis* of the fall of the angels (Gen 6:1-4) looks to be a highly expurgated rump of the Enochian cycle of legends on the fall of angels. The author of *Genesis* has cut it down so severely that it now reads clumsily, though he evidently felt obliged to nod at least toward the legends to placate some faction. The same is true of the few cryptic references to Enoch himself.

In fact, the story is two stories intertwined. One describes how Asael brought human knowledge to the earth, corrupting the creation with knowledge of the eternal secrets of metallurgy and cosmetics, until he was bound by the angel, Raphael, under the rocks of the burning desert. In the *Similitudes* 55:4, the Elect One judges Asael as the chief of the wicked angels. Elsewhere in the same book (*1 Enoch* 69:2) the same angel is only 21st in rank of the rebel angels, while in a Qumran fragment (4Q201) of the *Book of Giants*, he is tenth. In the *Book of Dreams* he is a fallen star who corrupted Adam and Eve by encouraging them to explore forbidden gnosis. Thus the *Book of Dreams* explains what is absent from the story of Adam and Eve in *Genesis*—why the wicked serpent is even present in the perfect garden.

Adam and Eve might have been a late insertion into *Genesis* 2-3 probably to replace an Enochian version of the origins of sin that has been suppressed. Only Paul mentions the Adam and Eve fable in the *New Testament*. The cause of evil in the world in the Adam and Eve legend is human disobedience, that places the burden of sin on humanity, and particularly on women. Originally it was a parable of the estrangement of humanity from God when they disobeyed him, rather than the cause of evil in the world. Enoch offers a different version of the origin of sin, much closer to the Zoroastrian idea in that sin is caused by evil forces that oppose and try to diminish God's creation. As Margaret Barker puts it:

Enoch describes the corruption of superhuman forces which have opposed and diminished the creation, and put it in bondage to decay.

In *Romans* 8, Paul blames the decay of creation on its being in bondage—the corruption brought by Asael.

In the account of the scapegoat in *Leviticus* (Lev 16:6-28), the purpose of the goat is explained as an appeasement to the desert spirit, Azazel. Nothing more is known about Azazel, but the monotheistic Israelites seem to be offering a spirit other than God a goat as a sacrifice, albeit disguised as the bearer of the nations sins. He sounds like the demon Asael imprisoned in the desert by Raphael but still requiring his annual ration of sins. Some of the versions of *1 Enoch* call Asael Azazel.

The other story intertwined with that of Asael in *1 Enoch* 6-10 is of how 200 angels led by Semihazah bound themselves together by oath then descended to earth to take human wives. Their offspring were the wicked demaons that infested the earth with misery. This is strongly Zoroastrian, the Daevas being the old gods of the heavens, the shining ones, or stars, who were categorized by Zoroaster as evil. The Evil Spirit in Zoroastrianism confounded the Good Spirit in its creation of Good Things by creating Bad Things, and here is an explanation of how the wicked demona were generated to plague the world by the Wicked 200 Stars or Angels seducing unwary human females. The fate of the 200 demaons was to be confined by the Archangel Michael for 70 generations before they saw their demon offspring destroy each other. Then they were judged at the Last

Judgement and taken to their own destruction. With the destruction of these “Watchers,” the world would be restored to the original perfection of its pristine state. Only at this point does Enoch have a part to play—telling the fallen angels of the judgement against them.

Now the cosmic legends of angels breeding with women supposes that angels could lust and had the wherewithal to rape and fornicate. These are strange yearnings and bodily equipment for eternal beings. Gods are immortal and could have no need for procreation, so angels ought not to have “privvy members.” The Greek gods used many strange methods of birth, often the result of having to make supposedly masculine figures behave as females, but, when they acted sexually, it usually was in the form of animals.

Why do these angels lust after sex? Why indeed should God’s Good Creation of angels revolt against him? In the Zoroastrian outlook, revolution and disobedience were the work of the Wicked Spirit created by him to disrupt Arta, the cosmic order created by God. It looks as though a half understood story that revolt was the work of the Evil Spirit has been retold wrongly as a rebellion of initially Good Angels.

The Judaic religion was apparently opposed to knowledge. In the myth of Adam and Eve, knowledge is forbidden but the pair disobey their instructions and find it. The immediate result was the knowledge of sex, though no explanation is given of why this pair should have been sexually endowed if God expected them to be obedient and therefore immortal. Knowledge for Enoch made him as a god and that is the fear of the gods in *Genesis* but in fact knowledge makes Adam and Eve mortal—it is depicted as a curse for them. In the Hebrew language the word for sex is a euphemism, “to know.” So knowledge or wisdom was immediately linked to sexual knowledge.

In the Enochian stories, women seem to have been aware of their sexual charms even before the angels fell. How were human beings reproducing if not sexually, or were all humans created immortal and therefore gods in the first place. Humans are themselves therefore, the fallen angels. Another explanation for the fall was “Pride.” The king of Babylon (Isa 14) fell through excessive pride, and so too the king of Tyre (Ezek 28:16). In *Philippians* 2:5-11, Jesus is exalted because he was humble unlike the proud angels that fell for trying to equal God. Here is the origin of the Essene obsession with humility displayed plainly in the gospels with the last being first and the first last.

## **Corrupt Priests as Fallen Angels**

In Hellenistic times, the corrupt priesthood who came to be the Sadduccee class were regarded as fallen angels who lusted after human women—in other words simply women, particularly non-Jewish ones. Heaven was conceived as being a celestial temple, and the earthly temple was part of it—a bridge to heaven. Bridges were indeed built to access the temple across the Tyropaeon Valley (Robinson’s Arch and Wilson’s Arch), probably for symbolic reasons as well as practical ones. Within, the temple was built in tiers in a pyramidal fashion with the successive steps leading ever higher to the holier parts. Highest was the Holy building itself with its Holy of Holies where God dwelt, supposedly entered only once a year by the High Priest.

Priests were therefore considered to be heavenly beings—angels. Their ministrations to God in the temple exactly reflected the ministrations of God’s attendant angels in heaven, a parallel that appears in Hebrews 9. The corruption began when Alexander overthrew the Zoroastrians and his generals began the Hellenization of

the Persian empire. The history of the temple under the Ptolemies in the third century is scarcely known, except that the earlier Ptolemies favoured the cult for their own political ends. They offered favours and wealth to the Jerusalem temple and it is inconceivable that they did not get something for it. They placed priests in power acceptable to themselves. When the Greek appointees took over the temple, they behaved in an unangelic way, and the stories in the Enochian cycle of fallen angels were allegories of the corruption of the sacerdotal class. The displaced Persian priests and their sympathizers, the traditionalists, started a counter movement and began to write anti-Hellenistic propaganda. Much of it is now the Enochian literature, and it seems plain that the Essenes were at the tail end of this movement, some of whom eventually started Christianity. Thus the beginnings of the Enochian tradition might be as far back as the start of the fifth century but it had its biggest boost, as a protest against the Graecized Sadducees or their predecessors, when the Greeks took over the temple in the third century.

## Cosmic Mysteries

An angel then (Chapters 14-36) takes Enoch on a tour of the earth and the lower heavens showing him cosmic mysteries. He receives celestial wisdom, apparently the forbidden knowledge of Adam and Eve, and sees the Tree of Life making him into an angel. So, obtaining forbidden knowledge is wicked but, in the Enochian tradition, knowledge itself is not being the attribute of gods, enabling a righteous man to walk with them. This theme of an angelic being giving a specially chosen exceptionally righteous man a tour of heaven is repeated in *Ezekiel*, and in the Christianized book called *Revelation*, where it tends to show that it was Jesus who was being given the tour originally, not John. Christians made Jesus into the lamb of God and so had to have someone else being shown around. The revelation was *to* Jesus not *of* him!

In *1 Enoch* 14, the hero goes up to heaven with winds, mists and clouds until he sees a crystal wall surrounded by fire, and a crystal house with stars and lightning as its ceiling. Within it another house was made of flame which had a crystal throne with shining wheels, fire flaming from beneath it and Great Glory upon it in shining white robes. A myriad myriad angels stood before him, and cherubim.

Here is a primitive description of the sun god sitting on his throne in his heavenly abode. The ancient belief was that the sky was of stone, the source of meteorites, and the rigidity that kept the fixed stars in their places. When metals were found to be superior to stone as tools and weapons, the sages had to find metals in the heavens instead of stone. Their answer was in the crystalline ores from which metals were smelted. Crystals were stones, and metals came from them through heat, so the heavens were made of stone but it was crystalline. The heavenly traveller meets a crystalline wall—the sky itself—and a crystal house or heavenly temple, the abode of God.

The references to flame and fire mean the sun, and God is the gleaming brilliantly white corona, seen in solar eclipses—the Great Glory. The myriads of attendant angels are the stars, and the throne had wheels because it was the solar chariot in ancient legends, taking the sun in its daily run across the sky. Enoch has to take the message of the fate of the “Watchers,” who have left heaven to take human wives—errant priests marrying out of the religion.

In *Exodus* 24:10:



They saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.

God's throne was standing on a sapphire pavement—the blue crystalline sky! Here too he is surrounded by angels, the stars. In *Isaiah*, God says:

The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?

The throne of God is to be in His house, the temple, considered as part of heaven, and Isaiah is appointed a messenger of judgement, just as Enoch was. Job asks:

Hast thou with him spread out the sky, which is strong, and as a molten looking glass?

In *Ezekiel*, a vision of a chariot throne is seen again, with strange creatures, and the prophet again has a message to transmit. *Enoch*, *Isaiah*, *Ezekiel* and *Revelation* are all narratives of similar visions of a sun god enthroned in heaven, or rather beyond heaven because his throne is on a crystal sea (Rev 4:6;15:2) or pavement—the sky itself is beneath him. Ezekiel and John both add a rainbow, lightning and thunderous sounds to the description. God's throne was *on* the sky, showing that God was beyond it—the power behind the heavens. Hence we read in *Psalms* 19 that “the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork,” declaring the transcendence of God in the same way as Zoroastrianism saying that the heavens were God's cloak.

The descriptions of heaven in *Ezekiel* echo the iconography of Assyria and Persia. The building on a high mountain (Ezek 40:2) is the temple in the sky. Persian worship was originally outdoors, the massy heavens offering the only roof they wanted, but when they did begin to build temples, they often built them on high places, either natural mounds or artificial ones when there was no alternative. Perhaps this reflected their gradual move from pure Mazdayasnaism to Mithras worship, the lesser god growing as the visible face of the hidden God behind the universe, until he took his place when the Greeks replaced the Persians.

Ezekiel's temple was decorated with trees and cherubim (Ezek 41:17-19), typical Assyrian motifs, and from it came a great river, again a motif of the time—a celestial river, a misunderstanding of the sky represented as the crystal sea. The metaphorical nature of these visions is often made explicit—the elements of the vision are “like” their analogy showing that they were not them. So one “like unto the son of man” of Daniel was not a man. In the Enochian allegories, those “like” men were angels. Priests going about their duties in Assyrian and Persian reliefs are shown with wings. The descriptions of Ezekiel are apparently explicit descriptions of temple iconography.

The “revelations” of *Deuteronomy* were earlier because God was *not* seen, only heard (Deut 4:12). In *Exodus* 13:18-23, Moses cannot see God and live. Biblicists follow the bogus internal history of the scriptures and think that the bulk of Isaiah and Ezekiel are earlier than they are, simply because they profess to be, as any pseudepigraph would! It is the scholarship of simpletons taken in by religious pig-in-a-poker. It is like attributing a text in Esperanto to the Reformation because it says it is!

The law was given by the Persians whose god was Mazda, an unseen god. Mithras was their visible god, associated with the sun, and the evidence points to Mithras replacing Mazda in later traditions, but particularly when the Persians lost power. The reason was probably precisely that he was more visible and therefore comprehensible to simpler folk than a hidden god. Modern Christians are not satisfied with an unseen God and have to have their images or fantasies about Jesus to bring god near to them.

## **The Book of Similitudes**

The second book (chapters 37-71) in the originally found version of 1 Enoch is the *Book of Similitudes*, but no trace of this has been found among the fragments of about eleven editions of Enoch at Qumran, and it is suspected to be a Christian replacement for the *Book of Giants*, which appears in its place in the Qumran versions.

The “Elect One,” familiar in the Qumran texts, occurs fourteen times in 1 Enoch, (see 45:3, for example). The “Elect One” would “sit upon the throne of glory” and the “Elect One” would “dwell in the midst of them,” so 1 Enoch is the source of the “voice out of the cloud” saying to Jesus in Luke’s mistranslated verse: “This is my Son, the Elect One (Greek “ho eklelegmenos,”): hear him”.

In the second Similitude, the mountains are allegorized as powerless before Yehouah Elohim. Plainly these are not mountains in a geographical sense but metaphors for powerful evil entities—the great alien empires that were undermining the traditional religion of the believers. In 1 Enoch 18:13, the fallen angels are like burning mountains. In Jeremiah 51:25, Babylon is a destroying mountain that would itself be burnt, while in Revelation 8:8, a burning mountain falls from heaven. These are defeats of the great powers seen as Evil Spirits. The Christianized Revelation is an older work edited to celebrate the unrecognized victory of Jesus and the Nazarenes over the Jerusalem garrison that allowed him to control the temple for several days.

The Similitudes (1 Enoch 41) also mention a great oath that binds together the forces of nature—it is a cosmic covenant that kept the sea in check, the heavenly bodies in their places and secured the order of creation. The angel entrusted with upholding this oath, according to 1 Enoch 69:16-21, is none other than the archangel Michael, the Jewish version of Mithras, the Zoroastrian guardian of covenants! The great universal oath means Arta, the Persian principle of order. To seek to break it was to join the Evil Creation and therefore be an enemy of God.

## **The Astronomy Book**

The third book of 1 Enoch is called the *Astronomy Book* because it continues Enoch’s tour of the heavens showing him how the heavenly bodies move and how the seasons change (chapters 72-82). The fragments of the *Astronomy Book* found at Qumran are from a bigger book than that extant today. The archangel Uriel shows how the heavenly bodies are controlled, astronomy and astrology being accepted as a part of eastern celestial religions.

The proper calendar was to be a solar one, linking the source with Jubilees and the Dead Sea Scroll sect, and also to the solar calendar of the Persians and the Babylonians. At some stage a lunar calendar was accepted by the Jerusalem priesthood, possibly by the Sadducees, and the traditionalists saw this as an affront.

Enoch's *Astronomy Book* highlights the importance of the intercalated day every quarter that gave 364 days to a normal year of twelve 30 day months. The year was therefore just 1¼ days short of the correct length. Every quarter had a patron angel as did every month making 16. This is reflected in the Qumran texts and probably in the organization of the Nazarenes—twelve apostles, three priests and a prince. In *Micah* 5:5, the prince is accompanied by eight principal men and seven shepherds.

Artaxerxes modified the Persian calendar, but all he did, it seems, was give each day of the month a different name, but they were names of Yazatas, the Persian spiritual helpers, and so angels, in effect. The months were also named after Good Spirits. It seems that the Jews retained the Babylonian names of months and did not attempt to name their days simply referring to them by number, or they reverted back to the Babylonian system when the Greeks took control.

## The Book of Dreams

Next is the fourth book, the *Book of Dreams* in which Enoch relates the dreams of his youth—dreams of the end of the earth and of the history of the kingdoms of God up to the setting up of the throne of the Messiah—to his son Methuselah (chapters 83-91). The end of the history seems to be the establishment of the Jewish kingdom under the Maccabees in 167 BC.

What is curious is that the history is disguised by allegorizing it in animal form, like *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. As such it helps to explain some of the metaphors of Christianity. Adam is a white bull, the twelve sons of Jacob, the Jews, are sheep, enemies of the sheep are eagles, vultures and ravens. Here is an apparent Zoroastrian division between the Good Creation of the domestic animals and the scavengers that disposed of corpses from the silent towers. Jesus, at an early stage of the evolution of Christianity, was seen as the flawless Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7). Angels in this scheme are men in white, as they are in the gospels, and three sheep were elevated into their ranks—Noah, Moses and Elijah. Later, the men who habitually wore white—other than practising priests who were considered angels anyway, the temple being heaven—were the Essenes who considered themselves as priests and aspired in their purity and righteousness to be angels.

The angels were the shepherds of the sheep, as they are in *Ezekiel* 34. Wicked shepherds neglect their flocks, and at the end of the story, the wicked shepherds and the sheep who blindly followed them were judged (1 *Enoch* 90:22-27). The sheep that chose wickedness are thrown into a fiery pit, as are those set aside to the left hand in *Matthew* 25:41. In the quotation Jesus gives from *Isaiah* in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk 4:17), he declares himself to be the messiah, promising to give sight to the blind and free the captives, so that blindness is equated with bondage by parallelism. Pharisees were described as blind guides in *Matthew*. 23:16.

Blindness then is a metaphor for succumbing to temptation by bad angels. It is not physical blindness, showing that all of Jesus's cures of blindness were metaphorical eye openings, as should have been obvious to anyone, especially if they care to call themselves scholars. There can be few Christian ministers and scholars who are not aware of this simple and logical metaphor, but they will not let on to their own flocks. They too are blind guides, by precisely the same criteria. They are dishonest dissemblers continuing to fool simple believers for their own gain.

There was a relationship between the words blind, lame, deaf and dumb and the names of the various

categories of evil angels.

Margaret Barker

“Watcher” is the name for an evil angel that is similar in Hebrew to the word for blind! The Enochian *Book of Dreams* says that *Watchers* were the demons that made people blind.

## The Epistle of Enoch

Lastly, the fifth book, the *Epistle of Enoch*, is really the testament of Enoch to his children (chapters 92-105) rather like the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. It is like the books of the prophets, an exhortation to obedience to avoid adverse judgement. The reward for the righteous in the *Book of the Watchers* is a ripe and prosperous old age, but in the *Epistle of Enoch* it is to dwell with the angels, rather suggesting that the revelation that occurred was a gradual one by the Persian priest-administrators to people initially unaware of the wonders of eternal life for the obedient. The Sadducees, like most modern Jews, considered prosperity in life God’s blessing, but the writing cannot have been in that direction because the Sadducees did not believe in angels either—far too Persian!—so they would not have been writing about “Watchers.” The Persian influenced Jews came to believe from their teachers in the Persian concept of an everlasting reward in a perfect world.

More interesting is that the *Book of Watchers* contained no criticism of the temple but the *Epistle of Enoch* does, declaring that the coming of the Last Days would be signalled by its renewal. The Enoch faction evidently saw the temple as having been corrupted—the view of the Essenes and the Dead Sea Sectarians. When Jesus cleansed the temples, he declared in Enochian terms that the Judgement would soon follow. He plainly declared his belief that the world in its corrupt form was about to end.

Within the *Epistle of Enoch* is another work that has been named the *Apocalypse of Weeks*. It is another history of Israel forced into a framework of seven and seventy week periods. All such ideas of artificial history, though they seem strange to us, were expressions of the Zoroastrian concept of Arta or Asha—order. The different attempts would today be called hypotheses. Here the idea was that God had made the world in such a way that important events would appear in sequences of seven and seventy weeks of years. Their objective was ultimately to be able to descry the signs of the end coming. They were modifications of the Zoroastrian theory of history. Here, a momentous revelation of gnosis in week seven is followed by the triumph of the righteous in week eight, the rebuilding of the temple in week nine and the Final Judgement in week ten. Blindness is again the metaphor for those who succumb to temptation and sinfulness.

## Is Enoch Zoroaster?

One passage in *1 Enoch* features the acceleration of time as the eschaton draws near. *1 Enoch* 80:2:

But in the days of the sinners the years will become shorter, and their seed will be late on their land and on their fields, and all things on the earth will change, and will not appear at their proper time.

From Adam, life-spans have diminished, and will continue to diminish, until the End. Time speeds up as the eschaton approaches, so that years, months and days are shortened until the natural processes of organic growth and aging are no longer synchronous with the accustomed advance of the seasons. The *Oracles of*

*Hystaspes* a Parthian pseudepigraphic apocalypse, like the *Sibylline Oracles*, that survives mainly in the seventh book of the *Divine Institutes of Lactantius*, contains a passage that features eschatological time shortening. After various woes:

The year will be shortened, the month diminished, the day compressed to a brief moment...

If the *Oracles of Hystaspes* are genuinely Zoroastrian, time shortening has been taken by Jewish apocalyptists from Iranian eschatology. A shortening of life-span could be interpreted to reflect an acceleration in time's motion and thus the maturity process, so much so that in the words of *Jubilees*:

The heads of children will be white with grey hair, and a child three weeks old will look like a man who is a hundred... (Jub 23:25)

The author of the apocryphal *Epistle of Barnabas* quotes the *1 Enoch* three times, twice calling it "the scripture" (Barnabas 4:3;16:5,6). *Barnabas* 4:3 has the concept of shortening time, but also refers to a "beloved," hastening to claim "his inheritance," absent from *1 Enoch*.

3. ...as Enoch says, For to this end the Lord has cut short the times and the days, that his beloved should make haste and come to his inheritance. 4. And the Prophet also says thus: "Ten kingdoms shall reign upon the earth and there shall rise up after them a little king, who shall subdue three of the kings under one." 5. Daniel says likewise concerning the same: "And I beheld the fourth Beast, wicked and powerful and fiercer than all the beasts of the sea, and that ten horns sprang from it, and out of them a little excrescent horn, and that it subdued under one three of the great horns." (*Ep Barnabas*4:3-6a)

Does Barnabas use a different *Book of Enoch*, or is he mistaken in attributing this quotation to Enoch? When he cites "the prophet also says" in verse 4:4, is he quoting a different source? Is it Daniel? Or is *Enoch* being quoted here as well? In the Qumran fragment 4Q385:3, Ezekiel relates how he addressed God and the reply he had:

Let the days hasten on fast until all men will say, Indeed the days are hastening on in order that the children of Israel may inherit... and the Lord said to me, I will not refuse you, Ezekiel: Behold, I will cut short... the days and the years...

*Barnabas* 12:1 reads:

Similarly again he describes the cross in another prophet, who says, And when shall all these things be accomplished? The Lord says, When a tree shall bend and stand erect and when blood shall flow from the tree

Kister argues that this parallels closely, and perhaps has as its source, the text of the Ezekiel pseudepigraphon (4QPseudo-Ezekiel, 4Q385):

And I said, O, YHWH, when will these things happen? And YHWH said to me, ...And a tree shall bend and stand erect...

Do these parts of *Barnabas* suggest Enoch and Ezekiel are the same? Such identifications as Phineas and Elijah, or Shem and Melchizedek occur in Jewish tradition. If John the Baptist can be Elijah, why could Ezekiel not have been Enoch? Such an identification might have been in the lost Enochic literature.

With his tradition of extensive writings, Enoch looks like Zoroaster himself. John Reeves of Winthrop University (*Jewish Lore in Manichaeism: Studies in the Book of Giants Traditions*,) has argued that Zoroaster and Enoch were the same person, or were seen as the same person, and this is why the Enochian literature is so great. In Manichaeism, Enoch and Zoroaster are the same—both the heavenly entity, the “Apostle of Light” in human form. Interestingly, in 3 Enoch, a Rabbinic work of about the third century AD, Enoch reveals himself to the heavenly traveller, Rabbi Ishmael, as the Metatron, the greatest of angels and identifiable with Mithras (Mitra) and the archangel Michael (3 Enoch 10:3-6). Gods and mythical figures in antiquity with similar roles are often equated. Pseudo-Eupolemus equates Enoch with Atlas:

The Greeks say that Atlas discovered astrology, but Atlas is the same as Enoch.

Many Greeks thought Zoroaster had discovered astrology, but Jews attributed its discovery to Enoch. In the late *Denkard* tradition, Zoroaster toured the supernal and nether worlds, as did Enoch. The Coptic *Zostrianos* also recounts a heavenly tour undertaken by Zostrianos. M Scopello has noted parallels between the *Apocalypse of Zostrianos* from Nag Hammadi and the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch*. Zoroaster was supposedly escorted by immortals, as was Enoch (Gen 5:24). In *Sefer Josippon*, however, Abraham invented astrology and instructed Zoroaster in its mysteries!

Zoroaster was identified with several other notables by ancient writers: Nimrod (Pseudo-Clementine, *Homilies* 9.3-6; *Cave of Treasures*; perhaps *Gen Rab* 38:13), Balaam (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.60), Ezekiel (Alexander Polyhistor apud Clement of Alexandria, *Strom* 1.15), and Baruch (*Book of the Bee*). Theodore bar Konai reported a tradition that Zoroaster was originally a Samaritan priest named Azazel! King Vishtaspa (Hystaspes) was Zoroaster’s first important convert and patron. A work thought to be by Vishtaspa, such as the *Oracles*, would have been considered authentically Zoroastrian. If the *Oracles of Hystaspes* were thought to be dependent upon Zoroaster, and if Zoroaster and Enoch were identified by some ancient assimilation, then it seems plausible to refer to the *Oracles* as if they were an Enochic work. This is perhaps how *Barnabas* or its source treated the *Oracles of Hystaspes* as if they were part of the Enochian literature.

## **The “Beloved”**

In *Barnabas*, “His beloved” is clearly meant to be Israel, so we have here an example of the Jewish idea of the matrimony of God and Israel that was probably the source of the ceremony at Cana in John’s gospel, not a booze-up but a messianic celebration of the forthcoming union of God and his beloved, Israel. The “Beloved” has become masculine but that is merely Christianization. It has become a Christological title.

Manichaeans used this title, “The Beloved,” to mean Jesus. In the “testimony of Vishtaspa,” quoted by Mani, is a chapter devoted to the testimony of Vishtaspa about the Beloved (al-habib). This “testimony of Vishtaspa” sounds like the *Oracles of Hystaspes*. If the *Oracles of Hystaspes* was Zoroastrian who was the original



“Beloved?” Zoroaster? Enoch personifying the perfect year—the year of salvation? Or was it a later editorial interpolation?

In *Barnabas* 4:4, the author speaks of the little king that will rise up after the ten kingdoms to subdue three of the kings, ascribing the notion to “the prophet.” The End Time is indicated by this sequence of rulers and the wars of these rulers are some of the woes that precede the End. A tradition associated with the *Oracles of Hystaspes*, according to D Flusser, states:

Ten kings will emerge simultaneously. They will divide the world... then a mighty enemy from the far North will suddenly rise up against them. When he has destroyed the three who control Asia he will be taken into alliance with the others and will be made their chief.

The Iranian source of this tradition is suggested by the Jamasp Namag which features three rulers who are destroyed by an adversary from the north. Only in the *Oracles* and *Barnabas* are time shortening and the ten eschatological rulers so closely interlinked.

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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 5. Persian Propaganda

### Esther and Crucification

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#### Purim and the Book of Esther

*Esther* is a novella set in the reign and court at Susa of Xerxes (Ahasuerus), the Persian king who succeeded Darius (486-465 BC). (The Septuagint and Josephus agree that the king was Artaxerxes I not Xerxes.) Fortunately, no one, even Jews and Christians, except total fundamentalist loonies, will deny that it is a Hellenistic romance rather than real history. It is full of fairy-tale improbabilities, and J C H How, in *Peake's Commentary* describes its ambience as that of the *Arabian Nights*. Though it is set in distinct historical place and time, it has been impossible to find any historical events that could match the far-fetched events of *Esther*, though the persecution of Jews as a religious caste in the Empire, a feature of the romance, might have been based upon the persecution of the religious caste of the Magi by Darius after the sedition of Smerdis had been brutally suppressed.

Its purpose seems to be a mythical justification of the Jewish feast of Lots or Purim, which occurs in the last month of the Jewish year, most often in March. In Babylon, the New year had long been the time when fate was determined for the coming year. It was determined by drawing lots. "Purim" is the plural of "Pur," which is neither a Semitic nor a Persian word. The Assyrians, however, did have a word "Puru" meaning a stone that could be used like a dice for casting lots, and its use in such a sense has been found on Assyrian tablets. Presumably because of the chance element in casting lots, "puru" also meant "fate," the Rabbis tell us, a point that will be significant.

Purim is a curiosity in Judaism because it does not appear in the law of Moses. Purim is not mentioned anywhere in the Jewish scriptures except in *Esther* and, as the Day of Mordecai, in *2 Maccabees*. In external sources, there is no mention of it until Josephus (90 AD). Moreover, it is not found in the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, the only scriptural book not present in that collection, though some fragments are thought to be fragments of a proto-*Esther*.

In a Greek version, the book is identified as having been presented to one of the Ptolemies and his queen, Cleopatra, dating it to about 114 BC or about 78 BC. Since Jewish heroes are listed in *Ecclesiasticus*, a book recognized as being no earlier than about 150 BC, and the heroes of *Esther* do not appear in the list, it seems clear that the book was written around 100 BC, give or take a decade or two. It was therefore Hasmonaean and was possibly offered as an excuse for the celebrations inaugurated for the victory of the Maccabees (161 BC) known as the Day of Nicanor on the 13 Adar. It was plainly a late adaptation to the New Year festival celebrated in the Persian empire, and proves the syncretistic tendencies at work therein.

The mythical event it celebrates is a deliverance of the Jews by their leaders, Mordecai and Esther, from a massacre planned by their enemies. Instead, their arch-enemy, Haman, was crucified in the place of Mordecai, for whom Haman had originally planned the fate. This storyline fits well with the national feeling of the Jews in their fight with the Greeks from 167 BC that led to the first Jewish free state in 142 BC.

The setting is convincingly Persian, a fact that suggests a Persian or late Babylonian original. The real king Xerxes, often thought of as incompetent because of his astonishing defeats by the Greeks, was actually no bad king. Inscriptions found at Persepolis prove that he was not just a restorer of religions but a man with the missionary spirit of the official brand of Zoroastrianism. Herodotus tells us that the wife of Xerxes was Amestris whereas here we find him with a wife called Vashti and then one called Esther.

## **The Story Behind the Book of Esther**

It is quite impossible in any story with boundless Mesopotamian references to find as its twin heroes a Mordecai and an Esther and not wonder how similar these names are to Marduk and Ishtar, the pre-eminent Babylonian deities. This suggests that the story is based on a Babylonian religious myth, and few people will nowadays disagree. Yet for long, Christian commentators, while observing on the “coincidence,” stated that stronger associations remained “entirely in the realm of theory.” While there is much to be said for scholarly caution, to ignore such evident clues borders on dishonesty. Christians, on negligible evidence, will believe that once a man was restored from death to life, but will say that here Esther is only theoretically similar to Ishtar.

Pious Jews and Christians are surprised that a scriptural book has no mention of Yehouah, or God in any form, prayer, worship or the law of Moses, though the Jews are spoken of as having their own law. Mordecai seems to be a personification of the Jewish God, but he is significantly not the absolute god, the Most High God—that is the role of the king, Xerxes. In Deuteronomy 32:9, the scriptures accept that Yehouah, the Jewish God, is not the Most High God. All nations had their own god—equal in rank and powers as sons of the Most High—and Yehouah happened to be the one for the Jews. By this token, Marduk, the national god of Babylon was the local equivalent of Yehouah. All of this was acceptable to the Persian kings as long as everyone recognized that the Most High God corresponded in heaven to the Persian king on earth. The Most High God of the Persians was Ahura Mazda (Ormuzd).

With this background and some knowledge of Mazdayasnaism (Ormuzd worship), the story behind *Esther* does not become difficult to discern. Ahasuerus is Ahura Mazda the Most High God, Mordecai is Marduk the Good Spirit, Esther is Ishtar the mediating goddess. Note also that in Babylonian mythology, Marduk and Ishtar were cousins just as Mordecai and Esther are cousins.

Haman (Aman) is Ahriman the Evil Spirit, the son of Hammadathus (Amadathus; Asmodeus?). There was an Elamite god called Humman, whom the Babylonians might well have demonized, just as Christians demonized the northern European horned god, among many others. Hammadathus is described as the Agagite, apparently a reference to Agag, the Amalekite. Amalekites were the traditional enemies of the Jews, the Chosen People of God—identified in the story of Esther with the Good Creation in Zoroastrian tradition. The Amalekites as their enemies were demons of the Evil One's Bad Creation, and would be fought by the High God and his Good Spirit “from generation to generation.” Ultimately they would be blotted out as all evil things would be when the world was renovated at the End Time.

## **Goddess**

Haman, the Evil Spirit, tried to stand between Mordecai, the Good Spirit, and the king (Ormuzd). Here we have

a trinity consisting of the king, Mordecai and Esther, comparable with the Father, the Son and the Mother, opposed by the Evil Spirit. The change in role of the goddess from the Mother (Mother Earth, Aramaiti) to an intermediary between Mordecai and the Most High illustrates a stage of the neutering of the goddess into the Holy Spirit, considered by Christians as God or the son, but not a goddess, in another form. Zoroaster had no place in his religious scheme, to judge by the *Gathas*, for a son and a goddess, roles probably played in the old Aryan religion by Mithras and Aramaiti.

Mithras never disappeared but merely was reduced for awhile but Aramaiti was converted into one of the Amesha Spentas, or worthy aspects of God. So, she had disappeared as a goddess and remained merely as a quality. When the later Achæmaenian kings, perhaps initiated by the missionary zeal of Xerxes, wanted to restore the goddess, they did not have one to restore and had to seek a suitable candidate elsewhere. The goddess they selected was Ishtar under the name of Anahita.

So, a foreign goddess was introduced into the Zoroastrian religious scheme. All of this appears in the text of the Esther myth. Vashti was the original consort of the king but she is cast aside for no good reason. She refuses to be paraded like an exhibit. Since such a parade, like the parade of Salome before Herod, was unlikely to have been seemly, her decision makes her noble in our eyes. It will stand for the reason why Zoroaster wanted to be shot of the goddess—she might have been the excuse for the Aryans to be licentious, and Zoroaster was prudish in his sexual morality.

Doubtless beautiful peasant girls selected for royal harems had to be scrubbed and scented thoroughly before they were admitted to the royal bedchamber, as Esther was, but here the long period of purification, scenting and cleansing possibly symbolized the adaptation of the foreign goddess to the Persian cosmogony which doubtless was not sudden.

So, effectively the story recognizes the rejection of the original wife of the king as a noble act of the original goddess in voluntarily standing down for the good cause in a principled manner. Vashti might be from the same root (from which we have “vision”) as Avesta, the name of the Zoroastrian Holy Book, and mean fore-knowledge. However, there was an Elamite goddess called Mashti who might have been derogated by the Babylonians and appears here slightly misnamed.

## **Marduk and Ahriman**

Mordecai or Marduk also begins the story in an impoverished position, obviously in some minor role in the king's service but scarcely better than a beggar waiting by the palace gate. He stands for Mithras in the reduced role he had under the Zoroastrian reforms. Later, however, he is established once more as the practical representative of the remote king, the Most High God. The underlying myth of Esther therefore seems to show how the two reduced or rejected deities under Zoroaster returned to favour.

Mordecai as the Good Spirit, a god of the world's righteous people, here taken by the Jewish revizer of this myth to be Jews, but presumably in its original context, Babylonian worshippers of Marduk, will not kow tow to the temporarily influential Evil Spirit, Haman. In revenge, Haman plots to destroy all righteous people, in other words all of the Good Creation but here again specified by the editor as the Jews.

In Zoroastrian cosmogony, the Evil Spirit, Ahriman, tries to destroy or negate everything good that was created. This is Haman's role in the novella. The lots spoken of in the title of the feast are the way the augurs, certainly Magi, decided favourable moments. In the first month of the year (Nisan), Haman consults the Magi and they cast dice for each day of the year. They came up with the decision of which day would be most propitious for Haman's plan—it was almost a year on, on 14 Adar.

Haman's plot is to "hang" Mordecai, but the plot backfires and in the end Haman himself, is crucified. Hanging to Persians and therefore here means crucifixion. Both Josephus (90 AD) and Jerome (400 AD) knew that Haman was crucified. The feast of Purim is held on 14 and 15 Adar, the last month in the Jewish year, which ends when the first new moon is seen to rise after the vernal equinox. On average, this will be about the start of April in our calendar. Purim is therefore held about two weeks before at the spring equinox. The New Year in Persian and Babylonian societies was considered to start when the days became longer than the nights, in other words, at the vernal equinox, so Purim is plainly a New Year celebration in fact.

The celestial event that marks this occasion is the passing of the sun travelling along the ecliptic across the celestial equator. This is the origin of the crucifixion myth. The gallows erected by Haman in his "house" are 80 feet high, an absurd height, but the point will be that the crucifixion takes place in the heavens and is notionally seen by looking upwards. The word "house" is another absurdity if the tale is thought to be history, but in myth it is not. "House" here means "domain," the domain of the wicked, where horrid acts like crucifixions can only be carried out.

## **Book of Life**

Mordecai saves the king from a plot and, as fate would have it, the king decides one sleepless night to look in his *Book of Chronicles*, in which the events of his reign are recorded. This is the "Book of Life" that the Jews and then the Christians took from the Zoroastrian faith. In Zoroastrianism, all of the deeds of a person's life are inscribed in the Book of Life. At the Day of Judgement, the book is consulted and the balance of anyone's good and evil deeds is calculated. The destiny of the soul depends on the sum total of good and bad deeds in anyone's life. Judaism has the same idea because it was given to them by their Persian overlords, and Christianity took it from the Jews, but in Christianity it serves no purpose because the fate of the soul depends, not on deeds, but on the gift of god, and then only for faithful Christians.

The king's sleepless night here is a plain literary device to disguise the fact that in the original the High God was consulting the book knowing the intended fate of Mordecai—crucifixion—and was purposely seeking to judge him. The High God in his role as king finds out that Mordecai has not been honoured for his good deed, though in the original, it would probably have been that he found Mordecai to be an exemplary person who was being wronged. None other than Haman, the Evil Spirit, as vizier has to lead about his enemy to honour him. Thus the Evil Spirit is humbled while the Good Spirit for the first time is magnified.

In the story, the goddess has to fast for three days before she can act to save Mordecai and the Jews. In Persian mythology, the soul remains with the body for three days after death, so the constant motif of the three days and nights in these ancient Near Eastern stories symbolizes death. The three day fast of the goddess is therefore a symbolic death. In Babylonian myth, Ishtar descends into Hades to find the vegetative god, Tammuz, who was apparently crucified at the autumn equinox and restored to life at the vernal equinox. Marduk took on

some of the characteristics of Tammuz, and here it seems the three day fast symbolizes the goddess's death (visit to Hades) in seeking to restore the god so that he could "save" the world by stimulating the growth of vegetation. Later, more sophisticated urbanites forgot that the salvation was in the fields and thought it was of their souls.

So, the goddess in the role of Esther, tells the king at one of her special banquets that the Evil Spirit plotted to destroy the Good Creation (the Jews). The king is aghast but realizes that the wickedness has been done in his own name. Meanwhile the vain Haman is distraught and throws himself across the goddess's sofa in supplication to the king, thereby polluting the king's property (his concubine as well as his sofa) and leaving himself open to the death sentence, which the Most High proclaims.

The banquets that queen Esther prepares for the king and Haman seem like a literary device to build up tension but are surely related to the Jewish idea of a Messianic meal—the origin of the Eucharist. The Most High is told that the gallows are prepared in Haman's own "house," the realm of Evil and he is duly crucified there.

Only now does Esther reveal her nationality. The secret is yet another literary device because a Persian king would not seek a wife from among people who were not Zoroastrian. The wife of Xerxes according to Herodotus was Amestris, his cousin to whom he had been married before he gained the throne. The latter part of Amestris looks like a form of Ishtar and so could match Esther, but, if Esther is meant to be Amestris, her history in the *Book of Esther* is wrong, and Judaism must have been accepted as a legitimate variety of Zoroastrianism. "Jew" was therefore not a national identity as modern Jews and Christians always claim, but a religious identity—a worshipper of Yehouah, one of the acceptable forms of the Persian Lord of Heaven, Ahura Mazda. Though the king has now been told the queen is not a worshipper of Ormuzd, he does not divorce her. Indeed, the myth ends in fairy-tale fashion with Jews running the Persian Empire.

## **Duality, Dialectics and Eschatology**

In Zoroastrianism, the God of Heaven, Ormuzd, makes everything happen, so the Evil Spirit of the myth has to achieve his evil ways by tricking the High God. Haman does not tell the king that he intended to murder all the Jews and did not put their name on the decree that he wrote out and sealed with the king's seal. When the tables are turned on the wicked Haman, the High God cannot repeal his previous decree but he permits the Jews to kill their enemies, and so they do.

This is not the sort of story to tell children, if it is told as history to be celebrated. Of course, it is not history. Jews and Christians alike see no further than a struggle of an oppressed people, the Jews, against their oppressors, the Persians. Yet the Persian king shows no personal malice to the Jews, nor does he show any favour to his own race! Indeed, he turns against them to favour the Jews, who he places in charge of the kingdom. This is so patently absurd, it is astonishing that intelligent people can believe it. It proves that the story is allegorical and that the king is not merely a king but the Most High god.

The Jews as the nation of Mordecai stand for the Good Creation of God, and their enemies are the Evil Creation of Ahriman. Daniel F Polish (*JSOT*, 85, 1999) has realized that the structure of the book reflects the dualistic nature of reality. Everything exists in relation to its opposite and events turn out to be the opposite of what was expected. This dialectical approach is the very essence of Zoroastrian religion.



The story of Esther is clearly eschatological and only A Lacocque, according to Lillian R Klein (*Currents in Research, Biblical Studies*, 5 1997) seems to have noticed. No one objects to the concept of the destruction of all Evil, including evil people, at the Judgement Day—that is what the story of Esther is relating. It is all fated by God's will, which is why the king is depicted as being unable to repeal any decree that he has issued. The same is true of all thoughts, words and deeds in Zoroastrian theology. Misdeeds could not be erased by forgiveness, they could only be atoned for by greater good deeds.

Once the edict against the Good Creation had been issued under God's seal, it became fate. It could not be cancelled but at best countered by an edict allowing the Good Creation to fight back—though this effectively guaranteed defeat for the Wicked Creation which is not God's own. The righteous are assured that, though Evil seems to be favoured in the world, everything will be all right in the end! The goddess's banquets for the king and the Evil Principle, Haman, can be seen as symbolic of the way in which Evil seems to be favoured even by the goddess. The tale assures the righteous that it is her way of waiting for the best moment while allowing the Evil Spirit to hoist himself on his own petard.

The Evil Spirit, Haman, has the royal seal at the beginning but the Good Spirit, Mordecai, has it at the end. With the destruction of the Evil Spirit, the Good Spirit, Mordecai and the mediating goddess are given all power under the auspices of the Most High, and the Wicked must convert or die an everlasting death. The apparent reign of wickedness in the world is merely temporary and will be succeeded by the victory of righteousness, to re-establish the Good Creation of the Beginning of Time. The story opens with extensive festivities that might be meant to depict the joy of Ormuzd's original Good Creation.

The idea that Persian laws were unalterable, a belief also contained in Daniel, is a misunderstanding. There is no evidence that this was true in Persia, and it would have been impossible if it were. Persians were competent administrators, and held together the world's greatest empire for 300 years. However, the religious laws of Zoroaster, like the law of Moses, were God's laws and so were considered unalterable. The author, not happy to acknowledge that there were laws other than the law of Moses elsewhere, also supposedly handed down by God, pretends that the Persian laws that were unalterable were the edicts of the king.

This might be a deliberate feature of the underlying myth, however, intended to show that God's decisions were permanent, just as Yehouah does not "repent" of what he does. Despite this, the goddess asks the Most High to "repent" of his decree to harm the Jews. He does not, suggesting that God does not "repent" of his actions, but he decrees that the Jews can defend themselves, as noted above, tantamount to giving the Jews victory, for they are God's Good Creation in this allegory and the Good will triumph in the battle of Good and Evil! No king could tolerate whole groups of his subjects hacking each other into pieces, more proof that the story is parabolic.

The goddess, Esther, is initially somewhat aloof from the struggle between Mordecai, supposedly her cousin, and Haman, being more concerned not to offend the High God at any risk to herself. Mordecai tells her that she too will die if the Evil Spirit succeeds. Now this occurs in Esther 4:13-15, a mysterious little speech in which desperate commentators, shocked that God never appears in the Hebrew version, thinks that Mordecai is making a veiled reference to Yehouah when he says:

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

They think "another place" means Yehouah in heaven. It is quite desperate for who is meant by her "father's house" but the Jews anyway.

The answer is in the original myth because Esther represents a goddess with a mediating role. (Judaism and Christianity abolish the goddess in favour of the Holy Spirit.) If she chooses not to support the Good Creation she is supporting the Evil Creation and will die with them ("thy father's house") when they are destroyed as they will be at the End of Time. Mordecai expresses confidence that Haman's plotting will be wasted whatever Esther does in this instance, because the Good Creation is fated to be victorious. At this point the Good Creation are asked to fast for three days and nights in the symbolic death from which they will rise triumphant when Esther intercedes with the Most High to reveal the trickery of Haman, the Evil One.

## **The New Year and Crucifixion**

So, the Good will triumph over the Wicked at the End of Time. Now recollect that this all happens at the end of the year, though Haman made the plot at the beginning of it—at the creation, so to speak. So, the year is serving as a measure of the extent of the world in time. M Eliade says:

Every New Year is a resumption of time from the beginning. ((M Eliade, *Cosmos and History*).

The end of the year is the End of Time when the Good will triumph, and the Persian New Year celebrations were seen as the triumph of Good over Evil. There is a hope and an exhortation here to moral improvement year by year, perhaps the source of our New Year resolutions to be kind to cats and to drink less. Good would be ultimately victorious and everyone should try to help achieve it.

Past time, the year gone is crucified as the Evil Spirit and the New Year is born as the Good Spirit raised up from his neglected position and placed in power through the intercession of the goddess. This role reversal is an extremely old motif of the New Year celebrations seen in the Roman Saturnalia, which itself came from the Babylonian Sacaea. Sir James Frazer tells us that masters and slaves changed places and the masters served the slaves.

Meanwhile, the king temporarily abdicated while a mock king reigned only to be crucified like Haman at the end. According to Eliade, the king's duty was to regenerate time, and this he did by killing the false king representing the Old Year, whereupon he himself, the true king, stepped up as if renovated as the New Year. The king is crucified and is resurrected. Remember this all happens at Easter!

Another practical result hoped of the myth is found in Esther 8:16-17 where the thought of being destroyed by the Good Creation (the Jews) persuades others (sinners, the Bad Creation) to join them—become proselytes—while they yet lived. That this policy was put into effect by the Hasmoneans around 100 BC when John Hyrcanus and his son, Aristobulus, forcibly converted the Samaritans, the Galileans and the Idumaeans to save their souls, points to this period as *Esther's* date of composition as a Jewish work.

Though Christians base their religion on a crucifixion, they have, churlishly criticized Jews for having a jolly, indeed drunken, festival to commemorate a different crucifixion. The difference is, Christians say, that Jesus was unjustly crucified by the Jews who they categorized as the Evil Creation and his fate is a reminder of human wickedness and a call to be righteous. Haman however was gladly crucified by this same Evil Creation of Jews, and they mock him and swing rattles at his name, celebrating and encouraging human wickedness with their gleeful festivities.

The forgotten truth is that both myths celebrate the triumph of Good over Evil and promise an eschatological salvation. In the Persian myth adapted to Judaism, it is the Wicked Spirit that is crucified to signify the triumph of Good, whereas in the Christian myth it is the Good Spirit that is crucified to signify the triumph of Good! Which is more logical? This has proved an important reason why Jews resisted conversion to Christianity. Crucifixion was the proper fate of the Wicked not the Good.

The Jewish customs of Purim include offering "choice portions to each other" and offering "gifts for the poor." These are not actions that might signify a bloody victory over enemies but the actions symbolic of God's Good Creation, righteous people. Meanwhile, they are to get drunk enough to damage their judgement, so that they cannot distinguish between Haman and Mordecai. The point is that in the real world neither can we poor mortals distinguish between Good and Evil. That is why evil persists. We had better sober up and begin to make the correct choices because the Good will succeed!

## **The King**

The king has been described as a powerful fool, and as a king so he would have been. But he is an allegory for the Most High God, who trusts everyone in good faith, just as he expects others to do. The king's viziers, wife and courtiers are the intermediary gods of Ormuzd, Mithras and Ahriman, Anahita and the lesser spirits known to Jews and Christians as angels and demons.

The Persian God expected all of creation, mortal and immortal to obey his laws, those handed down to Zoroaster. He trusts his supporting gods to be giving him sound advice and he acts on it. These are the reasons that the king seems to be guileless and manipulated, but he has no other aim but good and that is the outcome.

He is depicted as being rather vacant or more correctly, remote. That is, of course, how the Most High god is often seen and the reason why, in these so-called monotheistic religions, lesser gods breed as mediators between the mortal world and the High God. That is what has happened in Catholic Christianity, where various saints and demons take on the roles of Mordecai and Haman, and the Virgin Mary remains as the mediating goddess, just like Esther.

## Dating Ancient Near Eastern History (Part I)

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### Historical Dating

Though schoolbooks and popular history gives the impression that historians and archaeologists know the historical record like the backs of their hands, the truth is that dating historical events and archaeological finds is still the hardest part of writing history and is far from perfect. It is made particularly difficult in the Near East because the biblicists, so-called historians and archaeologists that spend more time with their noses in the Jewish scriptures than honestly seeking the truth, have decided already on the events that they expect to find and when they will find them. The result is that the whole of the many links in archaeology between different near eastern sites are forced into the biblical jug. That, of course, would offer no problems, if the biblical jug had the correct shape. It has not.

Careful archaeology of a site can reveal the relative order of events on that site and therefore yield a relative chronology. But it can only be linked to an absolute chronology when something on the site can be tied to an event of known absolute date. Broadly, good absolute dates come from the well documented times of recent history and ancient history back to about the eighth century BC in the Near East, using Assyrian records. It means that when a site can be dated by reference to particular Assyrian kings or officials, then the artefacts on the site can be given a sound date. The same artefacts found elsewhere can then also be firmly dated.

When objects are dated in this way, they are often found to be two or three centuries out of kilter with the dates that the biblicists have already given them! The biblicists then claim they are right because they have the authority of God, through the bible, on their side, and, even more important, they have the authority of the most widely accepted chronology of ancient time—that of Egypt.

The biblicists date objects by reference to the reigns of pharaohs, and even the Assyrian lists are dated with respect to pharaohs for the kings of Assyria before about the ninth century, when Assyrian records begin to get confused. The point about such records is that they often tail into mythology rather than sticking to history. The later Assyrians had an excellent record (lim-mu lists) based on officials who held office each year so that the year could be dated by their name (eponymy). The reliable lists of eponyms are from 911 to the end of the reign of Ashurbanipal (627 BC). The lists of kings gave a grander framework for the dating of the lesser officials so that a complete record exists back to the start of the neo-Assyrian empire. A solar eclipse mentioned in the list of eponyms of the reign of Ashur-dan III dates his tenth year to 763 BC, the earliest absolute date. The chronology of ancient Egypt rests on a host of unproven assumptions. That the literary sources of the anchor dates of Egyptian chronology are late and fragmentary does not help—the conquest of Thebes by the Assyrians in 664 BC begins the reliable dating of Egypt. Before Taharqa (690 BC), it is unreliable, whatever the experts claim.

Before then, the tendency for people, especially newly successful people, to exaggerate their claims to fame by magnifying their history prevailed. Besides that, Assyria seems sure to have split into lesser kingdoms in a

federation in the early part of the first millennium BC and yet the separate kings are all listed consecutively instead of concurrently. We do not know which kings overlapped, and yet the length of Assyrian history is thereby extended by an unknown number of years. The Babylonian king Adad-shuma-usur (1216-1187 BC) addressed a letter to two kings of Assyria! If four kingdoms co-existed for 100 years then the history of Assyria is extended by 300 years. Such problems lead to spurious “dark ages” when the culture and the activity of a nation disappears from the documentary and archaeological record.

Von Soden (*The Ancient Orient*) confirms that the kings of Old Babylon and Assyria were simply listed even when they ruled simultaneously. It was just that there was no easy way of doing anything clearer. Uncertainties like this give the Assyriologist a choice of chronologies varying by an unknown amount, guessed at 150 years at the time of Hammurabi, and longer before. The low chronology is von Soden’s choice, matching best the fate of the Hittite kingdom, and putting the reigns of Yahdam-Lim and Zimri-Lim of Mari after the Egyptian twelfth dynasty. The Mari texts do not mention Egypt, so it seems inconceivable that they could have been written during the powerful twelfth dynasty. The chaotic second intermediate period followed. The outcome is that about 50 years should be taken off the reigns of kings like Shulgi of the third dynasty of Ur, compared with the standards of the *Cambridge Ancient History*.

Thus the earlier Assyrian kings are dated by reference to the Egyptian chronology using diplomatic correspondence or more generally monumental inscriptions that describe battles, naming the enemy king. Some of the links are not so direct, being based on the discovery of mutual references in a third place. Discoveries in Crete of a mutual reference to Hammurabi and the Egyptian Middle Kingdom led to a revision of the dates of the Babylonian king, Hammurabi, from 2400 to 1792 BC, an adjustment bigger than the length of the Amorite dynasty of which Hammurabi was a part. Other changes have been more gross still. Sargon of Agade is reassigned from 3800 BC to 2300 BC. The early pharaohs have been reassigned from about 5000 BC to about 3000 BC.

Such large adjustments cannot be expected to happen continually. We ought to be converging towards the correct dates as more information is discovered, but biblicists and Egyptologists deliberately block the process with their insistence that all possible adjustments have already been made. Since the Egyptian chronology is the yardstick for Ancient Near Eastern dating, certainly before the first millennium and to some extent in the first part even of the first millennium, what is its basis, for being so widely accepted?

## **Egyptian Chronology**

The Egyptians had no fixed date from which others were measured, like the supposed date of the foundation of Rome, or the supposed date of the birth of Christ. Each pharaoh recorded dates within his reign from his accession, but, if the date when the reign started is not known, the chronology of each reign is of limited value. Dead kings do not erect monuments to commemorate their death. Sometimes a son or successor will, but they are not common. A monument erected by a king boasting of his exploits can help to sequence the reign when they can be identified with known events.

Precise dates of death and accession might still not be known even though the kings can be placed in relative order, so chronology is still not absolute. The process is also complicated when a king rules with his son as a regent, a practice that was not unusual because it helped train the younger monarch. The son might record his

reign from the time he shared the throne with his father or from the time he became the sole monarch. Sometimes a young prince sharing the throne with his father might die before the father, yet he will be recorded as having been a ruler.

Dynastic quarrels and splits can lead to rival dynasties, each recording its own dates, yet both will be listed as having ruled, and will appear in king lists as if they were consecutive. Later, historians will be inclined to take the lists as truly representative, knowing no better. Sometimes the order of dynasties will be unclear, and cannot be resolved without external references. Even these might not help when pharaohs have the same name.

The ancient authors of the king lists cannot be assumed to have been reliable. National or dynastic pride led to faithful scribes falsely extending the history of the nation or dynasty. They might use legendary sources to extend the king lists backwards in time, yet leave out unpopular monarchs. The Babylonian historian under the Greek Seleucid kings, Berosus, wrote the history of Babylon on a scale that went back 36,000 years. Plato wrote the story of Atlantis to suggest that Athens was a world power 11,000 years before.

## **Manetho**

Now, the order of Egyptian kings and the basis of Egyptian chronology is still to this day taken from the Ptolemaic (3rd century BC) historian of Egypt, Manetho! Yet, Manetho, was the rival of Berosus, and will have done the same sort of thing even if less flamboyantly. He wanted to prove the kingdom of the Ptolemies was superior to Greece or Babylon. The original works of both Manetho and Berossus are now lost. Several synopses of Manetho's list of kings have been preserved centuries later by Josephus, Julius Africanus, Eusebius and Syncellus, and they differ significantly. All of these except Josephus were Christians, yet even Eusebius had warned that Manetho's king lists were not a single sequence, some of his dynasties being concurrent. Perhaps Eusebius had tried to eliminate what he considered spurious kings, because Julius Africanus lists over 500 kings while Eusebius lists less than 400 in a slightly shorter time. That might not be so bad, if the names they present can be identified with pharaohs known from other sources but often they cannot. Flinders Petrie took no notice and began with an Egyptian history starting in 5000 BC.

No one will deny that Egypt began as many small city states in the delta and up the Nile. The diversity of Egyptians gods is accepted as a sign of this multiplicity of small kindoms, but Egyptologists have convinced themselves that these were all united by the time written history began. Many of Manetho's kings will have been concurrently kings of small kingdoms. Priests collected together the king lists of the most important cities and set them in succession to give a spurious antiquity to the country. What is vitally important and is never considered is that the Persians were fond of interfering in the records of the countries they conquered in the interest of their foreign policy. Egyptian records were rationalized by Cambyses and then by Darius II. We have no idea what other conquerors like the Hyksos, the Assyrians and the Babylonians might have done.

The whole practice of separating pharaohs into dynasties was Manetho's and is still used. The best known dynasties, from their own copious records, are the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties, and they discredit Manetho fully. Yet even though some dynasties have left no noticeable trace, they are still listed because Manetho listed them. The seventh to tenth dynasties are poorly documented and have left little trace on the ground but are still faithfully reproduced from Manetho. They stand for 34 pharaohs over a supposed period of 200 years.



Manetho's figures for length of reign are scarcely bothered with by Egyptologists, they are considered so unreliable, yet the lists themselves are taken on trust. Rameses III left a rich corpus of monuments, so he is well known, but does not appear in Manetho, or did under an unrecognisable name. Africanus and Eusebius did not give any names for the twentieth dynasty and so Rameses III was assigned to it as filling a gap and being in a suitable place after Rameses II. Yet, the list Georgius Syncellus, a Byzantine monk, made from Manetho, did include the names of the twentieth dynasty. Rameses III was not among them! He could have been a pharaoh any time from the twentieth dynasty on, and much suggests that he is a late king, but he now is a fixture in the twentieth and the succession of later Ramesides follow him.

The dates of the dynasties were also decided long before any significant archaeology had been done in Egypt, and even before the hieroglyphs had been deciphered by Champollion. The latter depended on the Rosetta stone found by Napoleon's army in Egypt in 1799 AD. It was written in three scripts including Greek and allowed Champollion to decipher the hieroglyphs. Another three-scripted document, the Canopus Decree, vindicated Champollion in 1866 AD.

Without the benefit of these discoveries, already in 1819 AD, the Scot, J C Pritchard dated the reign of Rameses III to 1147 BC, apparently as an educated guess because no justification of it has ever been presented. In 1841, Rossellini arbitrarily changed this to 1477 BC, and even Champollion's brother in 1839 AD dated this pharaoh at 1279 BC, again with no apparent reason.

Oddly, when the hieroglyphs of the temple of Medinet Habu, attributed to Rameses III, were read, they showed that the pharaoh had fought the Peleset, or Philistines, and this fitted in with the period of the Exodus and Conquest of the scriptures. These therefore are dates the biblicists do not want to lose.

## **The Sothic Cycle**

The Egyptian year was 365 days consisting of 360 days plus 5 intercalated holy days for the birthdays of the gods. The story is that the priests wanted to stick to this length of year even though it was short by approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  day, the reason why we intercalate a leap year every fourth year. Now the river Nile flooded regularly at a particular time of the year that was considered the start of the civic year. Yet because the calendar was out, the celebrations held, when the Nile flooded, slipped back each year, eventually travelling round the seasons until they coincided once more with the flooding of the Nile. The civic and holy years were hardly ever in synchronization.

At a rate of loss of  $\frac{1}{4}$  day every year it took  $4 \times 365 = 1460$  years for it to happen. This came to be called the Sothic year because its progress was judged astronomically by the heliacal rising of the Dog Star (Sirius) that the Egyptians called Sothis. A heliacal rising is when a star rises just before the sun, and so is briefly seen before the sun's brightness expunges it. Every fourth year the heliacal rising of Sirius slipped by a day from the Inundation Festival, so the number of years into a Sothic cycle of 1460 years can be calculated for any year that someone mentions the date of the heliacal rising of Sothis. It only remains to know when a Sothic cycle begins to have an absolute dating system.

It happens that a Sothic cycle is said to have ended in 139 AD, and so it must have started in 1322 BC, 1460

years before. Another manuscript puts the start of a Sothic cycle in the reign of a pharaoh Menophres. Identifying a Pharaoh with this name that coincided with one of the possible beginnings of the Sothic cycles could give us an anchor for Egyptian chronology. The scholars decided this pharaoh was Rameses I whose throne name was Men-Pehty-Re, and who, fortunately, only reigned for one year, so there was absolutely no doubt for Egyptologists (who are impressed by simple calculations and take them to give the stamp of scientific authority to their work) that Rameses I reigned in 1322 BC.

Another reference to the rising of the Dog Star gave a date in the seventh year of a pharaoh thought to have been Sewosret III in the Middle kingdom, who was therefore dated 1878 BC. The order of the other kings of the twelfth dynasty could therefore be inserted into the chronology. Lunar calculations based on the New Moon ceremonies allow a few choices of dates for Thutmose III and Rameses II, and the most appropriate ones are agreed by the scholars—1504 BC or 1479 BC for Thutmose III and 1290 BC or 1279 BC for Rameses II.

Peter James ([\*Centuries of Darkness\*](#), London 1991) adds that in respect of these two key references to the rising of the star Sothis, that provide the lynchpins for the conventional chronology of the Egyptian Middle and New Kingdoms respectively, “have been scotched.” Egyptologist W Helck (1989) pointed out that the Ebers Papyrus, which supposedly provides the Sothic fixed point (traditionally 1517 BC) for the New Kingdom, does not contain a calendar date. L Rose (1994) has shown that the Middle Kingdom fixed point (traditionally 1872 BC) from the Illahun Papyri faces the problem that the lunar data in it cannot fit a date in the nineteenth century BC. Though no trace of Sothic Dating by Egyptians is known, it was accepted by J H Breasted in *Ancient Records of Egypt* 1906 AD, and has remained unchallenged until recently. The power of the Sothic calculations depends on the authority of two writers. There is no reason for us to think they were intrinsically unreliable people themselves, but they obviously had sources and we do not know the quality of the sources. They might have been by unreliable people or they might have had copying errors.

On top of this, the identity of Menophres is far from certain. Menophres could be a Greek attempt at transliterating Men-Nof-Re, the Egyptian city of Memphis, where the priests probably made their astronomical observations. The original source or someone later in its transmission might have mistaken the name of the city where Sothis was observed for the name of the pharaoh when the cycle began. The basis of the identification of the start of the cycle with some particular pharaoh is therefore baseless!

Even if Menophres is a pharaoh, there are others who could have been identified as Menophres besides Rameses I. The choice is arbitrary. What if it was Mer-Nefer-Re or Mer-Ne-Ptah? The dishonesty of the method is proved in either case because they are rejected as respectively too early and too late. So, it is not an objective or absolute method of dating because it depends upon the presuppositions of the experts, and they are based on Manetho's inadequate lists.

Some Egyptologists claim that confirmation of the Sothic Cycle and conventional chronology is a graffito at Deir el-Medina in Western Thebes. It records that workmen saw the Nile inundation at that time and noted its date. It was in the reign of Merenptah (1213-1203 BC), and the season was in phase, showing the Sothic Cycle was near its beginning. It was supposed to have started in 1321 BC. A Merneptah date of c 900 BC would accord with the founding of Samaria by Omri, but would mean the supposed Sothic Cycle was out of phase.

The Theban Graffito is not at Deir el-Medina but overlooks the Valley of the Kings. It is among many crude

hieroglyphic texts carved by workmen. David Rohl explains that, in fact, there are two conflicting readings of the date caused by the poor quality of the inscription. Four vertical strokes denote the years and months of the inscription, but careful examination suggests they do not read Year 1 month 3, but Year 2 month 2, an error that arises merely because long separated strokes stand for years and short close ones for months. The correct reading is however confirmed by the month sign appearing only over the short two strokes. The date is therefore Year 2, Month 2 of Merneptah, not Year 1, Month 3.

The original interpretation of this script was 2:2 not 1:3, but this reading was dismissed precisely because it did not fit in with the then well held theory of the Sothic cycle. A hundred years later the wrong reading is taken to prove Sothic chronology!

A Nile flood beginning one month earlier (in month 2 not month 3 of Akhet) stands for a 120-year shift in the reign of the king. So far this could be acceptable since Merneptah was 100 years after the start of the Sothic cycle, but besides this the original translators apparently deliberately took a new meaning for the verb meaning to fall, meaning in the context of a flood, the fall in the level of the water. "The great flood began to recede," is the proper reading, not "return."

Even as an informal record, this graffito is unusual because the Egyptians put no importance on the start of the flood (as long as it did!) but on when it began to recede. They always recorded the highest level of the flood each year. From then on the flood was receding, and the workers, who were also peasant farmers, could plan the coming planting season. If the graffito recorded the fall away of the flood, not its beginning, it is another month later than the original Sothic interpretation allowed, the extent of the inundation being about a month. It therefore corresponds to a date another 120 years from the initiation of the cycle.

The Sothic dating method is thoroughly discredited, but even accepting it for the sake of argument in this case, the graffito cannot be accepted as proof of the accuracy of conventional dating. At the very least it suggests Merneptah is 120 years too early in time and it could mean he is twice that too early. Few Egyptologists now bother about the Sothic Cycle, though they do not look to revise Egyptian dates as a result.

## **Radiocarbon Dating**

One might have thought that radiocarbon dating and other such scientific methods would settle any problems, but the Egyptologists remain attached to their chronology and refuse to let go for a silly carbon-14 test! It has been alleged, on the authority of a prominent US Egyptologist, that if C-14 dating is done at all, Egyptologists will quote it in the main part of a "scholarly" paper only when it suits them. Otherwise, it will, at best, find its way into a footnote or, more likely, when it seriously challenges convention, it will be suppressed. So, tests are only published when they agree with orthodox dates, although radiocarbon dating is accepted at the start of Egyptian chronology with Meni, dated to 3100 by C-14. Two dates on material from the tomb of Tut-Ankh-Amun were never published by the British Museum and only reached the light of day when the laboratory released the results because the authorities would not. They gave dates of 846 and 899 BC when the experts wanted dates 450 years earlier.

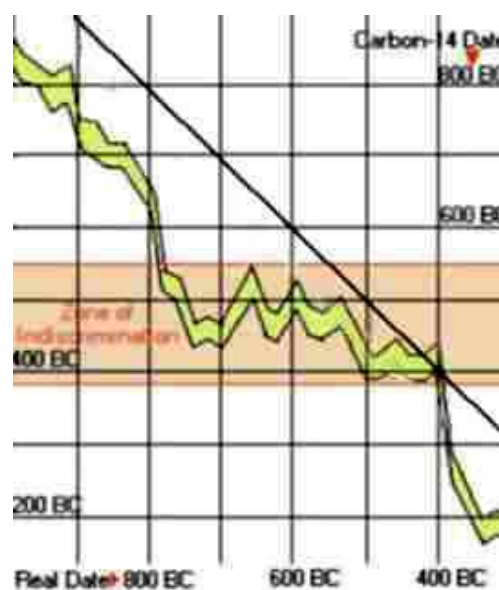
A report in 1979 of an Egyptian sample tested by the Pennsylvania, British Museum and Uppsala labs gave divergent results, the dates from the first two approximating conventional chronology but those from Uppsala

being consistently lower and closer to the revised chronology. Uppsala were noted for their care in removing contaminants. Timbers from three successive Mycenaean-period levels at As-siros in Macedonia were dated to 1130-850 BC, 1310-1020 BC and 1300-930 BC, when the excavator expected dates of about 1350 BC, 1450 BC and 1500 BC respectively about three centuries before the radiocarbon results. Unwanted results are easily blamed on contamination especially by fungal blooms, the excuse preferred by the believers in the Turin Shroud when radiocarbon dating showed it was medieval.

In all honesty, such tests, if done, should be published to stimulate other work to confirm or deny the original finding. It shows that these mainly classically trained people simply do not have a proper scientific outlook. They are all defending a view and refuse to consider alternatives with proper objectivity. The result, of course, is that the published radiocarbon dates seem to uphold conventional dating. Students first entering the field get additional confidence in it from this “science” and will be more inclined to join the in-crowd of the orthodox believers in standard chronology. They too will begin to suppress contrary results and the whole rotten edifice continues.

Equally bad is that archaeologists often submit unsuitable samples—randomly selected charcoal, for example. A sample like this that came from a large piece of timber destroyed by fire will often give a high date (it will be older than the fire) by several hundred years, if the tree was felled years earlier and it was a mature tree when felled. Or the timber might have been old timber re-used from an earlier structure. It might not be clear from randomly swept up charcoal that this is the case, but the date might then seem to confirm the excessively high dates that the experts prefer.

An astonishing example of this is given by P Kuhnholm who found a well-preserved juniper post, painted blue with modern door hinges being used in a modern village house. Suspecting that it was old timber, the scientist tried to date it by tree rings—unsuccessfully—so sent a sample to Heidelberg for radiocarbon dating. The date was 2000-2200 BC. So, if this village were incinerated today and that charred door post C-14 dated by an unwary scholar, the village would be declared to be Late Bronze Age! The youngest radiocarbon dates from a site should be taken, not the older ones that seem to fit current chronologies.



Calibration of radiocarbon and actual (calibrated) dates: Baillie and Pilcher - 1983

The radiocarbon technique itself is a flawed technique anyway, depending as it does on the false assumption that the ratio of carbon-12 to carbon-14 is constant over time. The technique has to be calibrated by tree ring counting (dendrochronology) and that requires many samples of wood felled in long sequences, in the rough locality, to be valid. In desert areas this might simply not be possible. An extensive and detailed project of tree ring counting across the Ancient Near East is needed to give a sound calibration for radiocarbon dating, and then a full radiocarbon survey of dateable material from key deposits should be undertaken. None of the great endowed theological departments in US universities seem willing to do it, and would we trust them, if they did? Even then, the dates in a crucial period of ancient near eastern history would have to be checked directly by dendrochronology, where suitable samples exist. This is because the radiocarbon calibration curve wiggles around a single date for four hundred years corresponding to about 800 to 400 BC. So any radiocarbon date for carbon originating in this period will give essentially the same answer (something between 400 to 600 BC) making discrimination over these years impossible.

Dates after this are too young and have to be lengthened by about 100 years, according to the calibration curve, so it is important for the researchers to say whether the result is calibrated or not. The importance of this is that the youngest dates yielded by a site are to be preferred because most of the combustible material on a site will be older than the site. So long as the technicians can count out more recent contamination, making the sample useless, the youngest dates must be chosen.

## **Dendrochronology**

Dendrochronology offers the best chance of getting precise dates. Unfortunately the leading dendrochronologist in the UK does not give any confidence that he is even balanced let alone capable of judging important issues. Professor Mike Baillie of Queens University, Belfast, has written a book, *Exodus to Arthur*, in which he identifies several dates from extreme tree ring events and then searches the literature to find correspondences. A correspondence seems to be any event that could be associated with the marker dates within a century or too. The sources might be historical but he shows a penchant for biblical and Irish mythology—and anything else suitably vague. In this way, he builds up temporal ley lines that point to bombardment by comets!

Who knows that it is not true? But meanwhile, Baillie should be locked up with his charts and mythologies in some suitable anchorage while somebody with a better awareness of the problems of historical chronology is given his professorship. Thus Baillie has the nerve to write that those who question current chronology, like Peter James and David Rohl, “suppress information to sustain their arguments” when one of their main arguments is that conventional chronologers themselves have suppressed information or given misinformation for a hundred years! He has nothing to say here about the wholesale suppression of carbon-14 dates that do not tally with expectations. On the contrary, Baillie says, but does not justify it in a repetitive book, that a revised chronology conflicts with “calibrated radiocarbon chronology and indeed dendrochronology itself.”

Suggestive results are beginning to come in. The Cornell University tree-ring dendrochronology sequence for ancient Turkey came up with a surprising result for the timbers used to build a gateway in a Late Bronze Age Hittite military installation. The last phase of construction of the Tille Höyük Gateway on the Euphrates was dated to 1101 BC. This was an Imperial Hittite outpost, dated conventionally about 1300 BC, and supposedly destroyed c 1190 BC. Field workers must be more ready to publish all results, not just the “right” ones. That is

not science!

It seems Baillie is satisfied with conventional chronology, but in a 270 page book gives us no confirmation of it except for a cursory discussion of the eruption of Thera in relation to Egyptian chronology. Thera was believed to have been the only volcanic eruption that could account for a high sulphuric acid anomaly in Greenland ice cores and dated to 1628 BC. That put the end of the Minoan civilisation, which had clear links with Egypt, at an unusually early date, requiring—the Egyptian experts gloated, the raising of dates by a century.

In any case, Eberhard Zangger, in *The Future of the Past*, thinks archaeological orthodoxy has it all wrong. Evidence of earthquake damage in the Minoan ruins is slight, and evidence of a tsunami negligible. Did the fallout of volcanic pumice and ash from Thera make life impossible for the Minoans? No. Ash deposits on Crete are less than five millimetres thick, and were deposited only on the eastern tip of the island. Archaeology suggests that the Minoans collected and stored the pumice that fell on them during the eruption, not what someone in a terminal panic would have done. Fire, which can be caused by earthquakes, or plague, might have been the causes of the social collapse.

Further analysis of the ice cores has yielded similar anomalies at 1594, 1454, 1327 and 1284 BC, the last one of which would eliminate the mysterious dark ages. Curious that those who leapt on the earlier Thera date will not even consider that latest one!

To this spurious evidence, Baillie adds the opinion of Kenneth Kitchen that Egyptian dating is not more than 11 years adrift. Petrie had assigned 36 years to Osorkon I and this was long accepted, but in 1967 an ancient stele lying in the cellars of University College showed that the reign was only 12 years. In an instant, 24 years were clipped from the chronology of Egypt, yet Kitchen is certain that no more than another 10 could possibly go.

Kitchen accepts that a Psusennes, named as the last pharaoh of the twenty first dynasty, was a contemporary of Shoshenq I, the first twenty second dynasty pharaoh, admitting that these two *dynasties* overlapped at least briefly. But Psusennes is made the last pharaoh of the twenty first dynasty *because* he is contemporary with Shoshenq, the founder of the twenty second dynasty! Since another Psusennes of the twenty first dynasty ruled 80 years before, and the two cannot be distinguished in relation to Shoshenq, a possible overlap could reasonably have been 80 years, or Psusennes II could even have preceded Psusenes I! This would eliminate the time of the wandering of the Israelites in the desert and Joshua's conquest.

Baillie perhaps recognizes this much in adding his own assertion that the margin of doubt in dating the New Kingdom is less than a century. Since radiocarbon dates are not that accurate they are useless, he maintains. He gives no actual results that might let us judge whether they are giving dates that are 300 years younger, merely telling us what he wants us to know. He cannot wait to hunt through legendary Irish king lists for signs of a cometary impact. Does he do this in his spare time, or is he paid for it? He is so embarrassed he apologizes often, but evidently could not resist a fast buck by writing a potboiler. Doubtless not all dendrochronologists are as irresponsible. Speaking of pots...

## Pottery

Pottery (ware) still is the best method of dating. Pottery is long lived and distinctive. Only a small piece (a sherd)



is often needed to indicate the type to an expert and the materials can be identified by analytical techniques like neutron activation analysis to discover where they came from. Imported ware gives cross links to contemporary cultures. Regretably the standard excuse used by those defending orthodox dates is that anachronistic ware or other artefacts are heirlooms—items saved sometimes for hundreds of years. With valuable items, the excuse might carry weight but it is used also of pottery—utensils!

Pottery only gives relative dates unless it can be keyed into an absolute date at some point. Associated inscribed architecture, documentation or monumental inscriptions can do this. In the Ancient Near East, the biblicists will not often accept it. The Cypriot black on red ware dated in Cyprus to the eighth century is dated by biblicists to the tenth so that it denotes the work of Solomon. The fact that it was manufactured in Cyprus means nothing here. The Cypriot factories have been wrongly dated!

J J Bimson, has argued that Tuthmoses III was Shishak, and the start of the Iron Age should be 500 years lower. In 1982, he showed that a downdating of 500 years gives an excellent fit with the development of glazing which without it seems curiously sporadic. The crude glazing attempts, the eighteenth dynasty and the Assyrian glazes of Assurnasirpal become contemporary at the beginning of the technique. There is no question of a gap, a regression, or a re-learning. It also puts the Neo-Elamite ware made of Egyptian Blue of the ninth century contemporary with similar Mitannian ware. Nor did Phoenicians stop making glass in the fourteenth century and start again c800 BC. So, Merenptah was eighth century and Seti I was ninth, each linking with evidence from the scriptures and the archaeology of Palestine. Tutmoses is shown with vast wealth being surrendered on his monuments, suggested by revisionsists still trying to save the bible as the treasure of Solomon's temple.

It is worth noting that the categorisation of eras into stone, bronze and iron by the Dane, Christian Thomsen (1834), nowadays has no implication that the boundaries of these periods represent a transition from say bronze to iron. They rapidly found that it was easier to denote sites by pottery and pottery has come to represent the distinctions between the various phases of the Thomsen categories. Thus, even if the invasion of Israel by the Israelites is given as Iron Age, it does not mean the Israelites were experts in working iron.

## **Dark Ages**

Oscar Montelius, a Swede, gave an accurate relative typology for sites in northern Europe in the nineteenth century and sought to find an absolute key by reference to Greek and Italian historical sources. None of these however go back before the beginning of the eighth century BC. At the same time, Flinders Petrie began to set up an Egyptian chronology. Egyptian artefacts, found in places outside Egypt, were then used to date the archaeology of countries that had no chronology of their own, or local artefacts found in Egyptians ruins or pictures of known periods were likewise used. The great discoveries in Troy, Mycenae and Greece yielded up typical pottery that Petrie found in Egypt associated with the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties. Petrie had already given dates to his finds based on the Manetho king lists and the Sothic cycle theory and so the Aegean findings were dated from them. He dated the start of the Mycenaean era to the start of the eighteenth dynasty, about 1400 BC.

The Mycenaean era conventionally ended when the Dorians invaded southern Greece c 1200 BC. The lowest Egyptian dates were twelfth century but the highest European dates were eighth century. It is the dark age of Greece. A four century "dark age" had appeared, and has been accepted ever since! What happened to the

Greeks between sacking Troy in about 1200 and the appearance of Homer singing about it in about 800 BC? Greeks thought the war had ended only three generations before the start of the first Olympic Games in 776 BC. The games had lapsed, the chronologers decided, for the 300 dark age years from the twelfth century to the ninth century—then began again as if nothing had happened! Greek and Roman historians never noticed such a gap before their own histories began about 800 BC.

The natural building material in Greece is stone, but the Greeks did not build in stone for 300 years, not even a temple. If the explanation had been a natural disaster like drought, people would have built temples to appease the Gods. They built nothing! Herodotus said the fall of Troy was one generation after the voyage of Jason to Colchis, the land of the Golden Fleece. Sir Isaac Newton, a man normally loved by Christians as a scientific genius who held to Christianity, dated this, assuming it to be historic, from the precession of the equinox to 939 BC. Hence the fall of Troy was dated to c 900 BC. Closing the gap gets rid of the mythology in the Jewish scriptures.

The deciphering of Linear B, the Mycenaean script, by Michael Ventris proved that the Mycenaeans were Greeks. Previously they had been thought more likely to have been related to the Cretans who were Semites. The Mycenaeans turned out to have the same pantheon of Gods as the Greeks, the same language and occupied the same space. The Mycenaeans disappeared around 1200 BC, having beaten the Trojans, and Greeks became illiterate and unskilled for four hundred years before producing Homer and Hesiod. These verses were written down in a Canaanite script supposedly from the fourteenth century! The biblicists want the eighth century to be the fourteenth century to give them lots of time to fit in spurious history!

At the very beginning, in 1896, Cecil Torr saw the anomaly, and suggested in *Memphis and Mycenae* that the Egyptian dates were wrong. He was one of the historians who, at the turn of the twentieth century, were not impressed by Petrie and were content to let the Mycenaean Greeks run into the Archaic Greeks, dating the end of the Mycenaeans in the ninth century, or even as late as the seventh. They noted that the famous supposedly thirteenth century Lion Gate of Mycenae has not quite so refined parallels in Phrygia in the eighth century. Since the Phrygians had not arrived on the scene until the ninth century, their lions could not have been older.

Plainly, Troy was sacked and then not long afterwards Greek poets sang about it. The Etruscans did not get lost for 400 years after leaving Troy c 1150 BC, then arriving in Tuscany c 750 BC. Classical Greek and Roman writers knew of no dark age. Nor for that matter did the ancient Greek and Roman historians say anything about major civilisations of the past like the Sumerians, Akkadians and Old Babylonians. A latter day suggestion is that Sumerian is the language of the Kassites or Chaldeans. Stretching the timescale to provide for Abraham left holes to be filled and they were filled.

From the classical writers, the date of the sacking of Troy must have been around 900 BC, closing most of the gap, and the “dark age!” One scholar, Walter Burkert, has recently concurred. Petrie was wrong because Manetho had not shown overlapping dynasties, and the Sothic calculations were imaginary. By having the start of the eighteenth dynasty in 1270 BC instead of 1570 BC, he easily saved about 300 years from the Egyptian chronology around the beginning of the first millenium and brought the Mycenaeans and Trojans within touch of Homer. The saving of 300 years got rid of these mysterious “dark ages” that had to be postulated, and brought into line many fruitful synchronizations. Despite Torr, Petrie prevailed, but his dates continued to be challenged, until they set themselves in stone.

To account for the dark age gap, the Mycenaean Greeks are supposed to have collapsed and the Greek population fallen to a tenth of its previous population. Drought is blamed—the Great Mycenaean Drought—followed by social unrest and collapse. But 400 years later the skills that such a collapse should have lost returned miraculously in the very form they had before. Not basic skills either, but the refined skills of making luxury goods such as jewelry, carved ivory and fine woven carpets. The styles were continuous. Doubtless there was a drought, but 400 year old droughts that collapse society to nothing then bring them back to their previous form when there is rain do not happen. A shorter drought might have caused the political and social changes noted at this time but the gap in time is an artifact of chronology.

The excavation of Troy ought to be conclusive. Level VIIb at Troy is dated in the twelfth century but the next level, Troy VIII, is dated as 700 BC! These are based respectively on the presence of Mycenaean and Archaic Greek pottery. Plainly the Archaic Greek period cannot have had such a huge gap from the Mycenaean period, and the two levels at Troy display cultural continuity. The key point is that there is no sign of a time lapse. A site abandoned for 300 or 400 years reverts to nature and leaves an obvious layer of decayed vegetation. There is none of this and no trace of any erosion that might have gotten rid of it. The two layers VIIb and VIII are unquestionably adjacent in the ground but in history are 400 years separated! In fact, some Archaic Greek ware is found in the top layers of Troy VIIb! The American C Blegen, in the interwar years, found layers VII and VIII unseparable, but persuaded himself that the earlier layers had been contaminated with pottery from the seventh century.

The great city of Troy seems to have been Troy VI, conventionally destroyed by an earthquake in 1300 BC. That was Schliemann's view but its conventional date is too early for everybody! Scholars like star TV historian, Michael Wood, say it was well built and had fine towers. The Iliad mentions the horses of Troy, and volumes of horse bones were found in Troy VI. Many implements concerned with textiles suggest it was a major textile centre. Troy VIIa was small and shoddy, had a shantytown, no imported luxuries. Its pots were mainly poor imitations of Mycenaean ware. Troy VI was a "great city," as Blegen recognized. Michael Wood reports imported Mycenaean pottery and other imported goods throughout Troy VI. Such luxury imports are of such a quantity that trade of this extent implies a direct route between Mycenae and Troy, but trade from Mycenae ceased around 1250 BC on conventional chronology. Wood says the shantytown of Troy VIIA, with its locally made Mycenaean imitations, fell around 1180 BC. The design of Mycenaean tripod stands for vessels did not alter noticeably when they reappeared in Greece in the ninth century despite the 300 year gap. Lowering these dates by several hundred years needs examining.

The dark age extended to the Levant. Cypriot four sided wheeled stands, supposedly twelfth century, are found in eighth century graves. The same design of stand is found in Sardinia in an eighth century context to judge by Italian parallels. Ivories found at Delos matched others found at Mycenae and at Megiddo, and also matched Syrian ivories dated to the eighth century. They had been found associated with eighth century Greek pottery! Tracing the development of Archaic Greek pottery does not allow it to have begun before about 900 BC, at least 200 years after the Mycenaean age. Did the Greeks not make pottery for over 200 years?

## **Philistines**

In the 1980s, Sy Gitin and Trude Dothan excavated at Tel Miqne-Ekron, thought to have been the site of the

city of Ekron, founded by the Philistines. They discovered it was built on a previous Canaanite city that had been destroyed.

Cyprus and Canaan could no longer import the Greek pottery called Mycenaean IIIB, and a new similar type of pottery, IIIC<sup>1b</sup> reflecting the same traditions and skills was made, but neutron activation analysis showed it was local not imported. The “1b” denotes that it was found on Cyprus and the Philistine coast. Archaeologists specializing on Cyprus associate Mycenaean IIIC<sup>1b</sup> pottery with Achaean refugees fleeing to Cyprus from Greece. At Ashdod and Ekron, this pottery was found directly above the Late Bronze layer.

Excavation revealed a gradual change from Mycenaean IIIC<sup>1b</sup> to the later Philistine pottery called “bichrome” ware having red and black decorations on a white slip. The shapes and designs are Mycenaean. The excavators assign the time to Rameses III.

The ruins of Ekron reveal a well-planned city some time after the initial settlement. The quality of the distinctive Philistine artifacts deteriorated at a time that the excavators assign to the eleventh century when the Philistines seem to have adopted Egyptian and Phoenician designs for their ceramics. Much of this pottery is based on a red slip. One might imagine that a people's traditions would last rather longer than the archaeologists seem to imply.

The city was then attacked. The directors of the excavation, using the bible and Egyptian records, decided that the attack was by David or the Egyptians. Thereafter, “a lack of material remains” led the archaeologists to decide that the tenth through eighth centuries BC were “missing.” The city was assumed to have been abandoned for the next 270 years, to about 700 BC. Curiously, at the end of the eighth century BC, after 270 years of dereliction, the city miraculously recovered to be even more prosperous than before, and grew bigger than its former fifty acres, with a substantial defensive wall. For the next century the city was a centre of olive oil production. The Assyrians controlled Philistia until about 630 BC. So, here is yet another “dark age” necessary for the biblicists' interpretations.

Thirteen four-horned altars uncovered at the site fatuously were said to have been made by Israelite craftsmen for no other reason than that they are mentioned in the bible!

## **Dismantling the Standard Model**

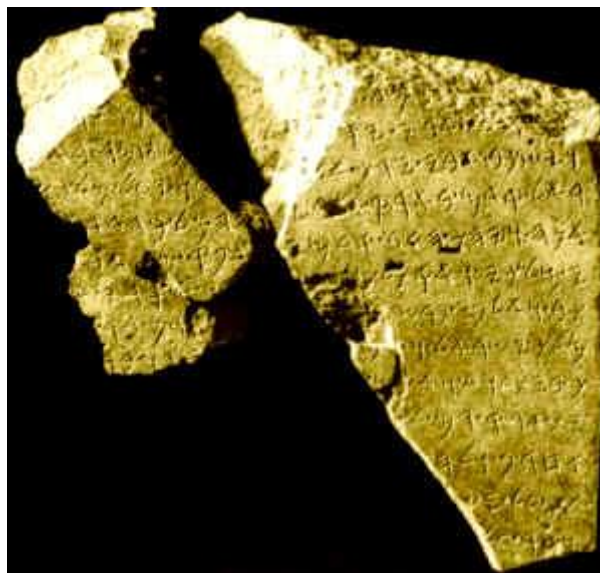
Peter James and the co-authors of *Centuries of Darkness* wrote that conventional model raised many questions. They thought there was “a strong whiff of unreality” about the dark ages of the ANE that supposedly descended on every civilisation in this region about 1200 BC. From Greece through central Turkey to Nubia, everywhere there was massive depopulation, while skills such as literacy, metallurgy, ivory working and the art of painting pottery are thought to have lapsed or disappeared entirely for anything up to 300 years.

Economic recession is a fact of history, but in this case every strand of evidence—from pottery chronologies to royal inscriptions—argued against the existence of such a long dark age. The evidence seemed to argue that Late Bronze Age civilisation did not end c 1200 BC but more likely around 950 BC when civilisation, and with it all the old skills, revived. What seemed remarkable was the evidence for continuity between the periods before and after the dark ages.

Why did the Nubians, thought to have abandoned urban life in the eleventh century BC, supposedly resettle two centuries later using pottery indistinguishable from that made before they set off on their long nomadic wanderings? Why was the problem encountered at Troy over the same time range? Was central Anatolia really totally depopulated between the twelfth and ninth centuries after the collapse of the Hittite Empire? If the Greeks founded Syracuse in Sicily in 733 BC, after expelling the locals, why are the burned huts of the last pre-Greek inhabitants dated to c 850 BC?

Such conundrums range across the whole of the Mediterranean and Near East and have in common that all depend for their dating on Egypt. Finds of Mycenaean pottery in Egypt enabled prehistoric Greece to be dated. Mycenaean pottery in Sicily, Sardinia, the Balkans and Troy has enabled these diverse regions to be cross-dated with Egyptian chronology. Yet, Egyptian history could be shortened by as much as 250 years.

Research has progressed. That Tell Abu Hawam in Palestine does not provide a fixed point for the dating of Greek Geometric pottery has now been generally accepted. The illogical 120-year gap between the “Cassibile” culture and the earliest Greek colonies in Sicily has conclusively been rejected in a study by Robin Leighton.



**Tel Dan Stele 800-825 BC**

In Israel, the dating of the first Iron Age settlement in Edom, southern Palestine, has one school of thought placing it in the twelfth century, another in the ninth. In 1992, a Greek krater (bowl) was unearthed at Tel Hadar in Galilee in a level dated by Israeli archaeologists no later than 1000 BC. Yet Greek ceramic experts insist that the vessel dates no earlier than about 900 BC. In 1993, the “House of David” stele was found at Tel Dan in northern Israel, giving the first historical reference outside the Bible to David and his house, but also forcing a profound revision of Israelite archaeology. Rupert Chapman, Executive Secretary of the Palestine Excavation Fund, carefully examined the situation of the find. The stele, which can be historically dated to 825-800 BC came from a level conventionally dated to the tenth or even eleventh centuries BC. It follows that the Tel Dan stone testifies to the falsifying of Israelite history by 200 years.

A dismantling of the standard model for the Third Intermediate Period in Egypt seems to be underway. A 20-

year adjustment in twenty second Dynasty chronology and a lowering in the dates for the twenty fifth Dynasty have been put forward in the *Journal for Egyptian Archaeology*. Two Egyptological reviewers of *Centuries of Darkness*—John Ray, Reader in Egyptology at Cambridge University, and Aidan Dodson—have now stated in print that Egyptian chronology could be lowered by some 50 years.



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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 6. Dating

## Dating Ancient Near Eastern History (Part II)

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If an excavator believes from the scriptures that an ancient mound must contain buildings from Solomon's reign, it is almost certain that sooner or later he will find structures that fit the bill. The spurious air of biblical authority given to such a discovery can then make the identification stick, despite any evidence to the contrary. In the meantime a small tourist industry may even have grown up around this "confirmation" of the Bible.

*Peter James*

### Palestinian Dates

Palestinian archaeology is confused, though you would never believe it listening to Sunday School teachers. Mycenaean ware is thought to be a product of the pre-Israelite period, whereas actually it denotes the period of Bit Khumri. Sherds of Greek pottery found in Palestine have been used to date Greek pottery in Greece! This is utterly bizarre because the biblicist archaeologists can never agree among themselves about dating the levels in their excavations. Needless to say, the dates are early but no one can get the biblicists to concede that their own dating is 300 years too high. It has to match their biblical preconceptions. In a recent example, a Greek mixing bowl was found at Tel Hadar in Galilee in a level dated by Israeli archaeologists to 1000 BC at the very latest. Greek ceramicists say the vessel cannot be before 900 BC at the very earliest! Stretching credulity as far as it will go leaves a 100 year minimum gap—the real gap will be about 300 years.

The common excuse used incessantly by biblicists is that the material cannot be dated precisely because the ground is "disturbed". What they mean is that they had rather say that the ground is disturbed than confess that it is they who are disturbed that the evidence does not match the bible. Kenyon found that the disturbed layers at Jericho had been so disturbed, they did not exist at all. In fact, their absence showed that Jericho had not been occupied for a thousand years, right in the period when it should have been conquered by Joshua!

Beth-Shan is another example. In the bible, Beth-Shan is the Canaanite city in the valley of the Jordan which, during the time of the Judges was not subdued, being defended by chariots of iron. Later, Saul fell fighting the Philistines and his body was carried to Beth-Shan and hung on the city wall. In the days of Solomon, it was an administrative center. Beth-Shan should have had a clear archaeological pedigree.

The truth is that Beth Shan was an Egyptian colony from about 1500 BC to about 1200 BC in conventional chronology, from Thutmose III to Ramses II. Thick layers of debris in this period are categorical. After that a thin unproductive layer is found, one fifth of the thickness of a single layer attributed to the time of Seti. The absence of the Israelite periods of *Judges* and *Kings* is explained:

The disturbance of the upper levels has made it scarcely possible to distinguish any stratification. We shall therefore, in respect of the pottery from above the Rameses II floor-level, confine ourselves to indicating such pieces as are obviously of Hellenistic or later date.

The missing layers are “disturbed!” They are so disturbed that again they do not exist until Hellenistic times, so anything found above the layer of Rameses II is Hellenistic. What then when something unusual is found in a house of the time of Rameses? Should it be assigned to the time of Rameses?

The presence of the Cypriote bottle number 27 is sufficient by itself to rebut any such assumption, as this type is, apparently, not earlier than the eighth century.

An eighth century pot is found in thirteenth century deposits but nothing should be deduced from it. Plainly, Beth-Shan existed only as an Egyptian city, and thereafter was scarcely occupied until Greek times, so that few remains are found assignable to the intermediate period. That is unacceptable to biblicists, so the layers that do not exist from 1200 to 300 are called disturbed! The presence of Cypriote ware on the floor of a house of Rameses II, suggests that the two were contemporaneous. If the site was deserted except for a few passing shepherds for 900 years, why should an expensive pot have been buried there? When Archaic Greek pottery is found in Palestine in stratified layers, it should be used to date the Palestinian layers, not the other way round. If the ground is manifestly not disturbed then the biblicists disturb it, or move the finds to places where the ground *is* disturbed, thereby doing God’s work.

The biblicist, W F Albright, had dated ivories found at Megiddo in Palestine as twelfth century. At Nimrud, capital of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, three large rooms full of ivories were found. Many were like those made in Egypt in the Amarna era in the fourteenth century BC. Shalmaneser III is firmly dated by Assyrian chronology to the ninth century BC. The ivories were therefore ninth century forgeries! Five female figurines found at the Dipylon Gate at Athens are identical in style to Nimrud ivories some of which are also found at Megiddo and, because of Albright, are considered of a Mycenaean type. Albright had also dated the Carmona Ivories, found in a treasure horde in Spain, to the twelfth century because they too resembled the Megiddo ivories, yet they show influence of the Greeks and the Phœnicians, neither of whom were in Spain in the twelfth century BC, though they were doubtless made by Phœnician colonists at a later period.

The earliest possible time would have been about the eighth century, and so the Megiddo ivories, that Albright wanted to be in the “time of Solomon”, are actually about the time of the Assyrian conquests. The story that Tartessos in Spain was Solomon’s Tarshish is belied by the scriptures themselves—the goods brought back after the three year trip were African and Oriental not Spanish. Sixteenth century Spaniards made the claim for the usual reason that history is altered—to boost their national pride.

Cadiz was founded, according to dates based on Trojan legends, in 1110 BC, but nothing Phœnician has been dug up in Cadiz before the eighth century. No Phœnicians traded in the western Mediterranean before the eighth century when Carthage was founded. The Carthaginians were in Spain about the year 600 BC, A Schulten tells us, but S Gsell says that nothing certain is known about the Carthaginians being in Spain before the fourth century BC. The Phœnicians controlled most of Spain before then, and it is probably the fall of Phœnicia with the Persian empire to the Greeks that allowed the Carthaginians a free hand to take over the Phœnician colonies in Spain.

Albright recognized the similarity of unquestionably eighth century Carthaginian ware with supposed tenth century pottery from Megiddo. It was, he said, because the Carthaginians continued to make pots in an old fashioned style for another 200 years after production had stopped in Megiddo. The natural explanation that the

Megiddo pots were eighth century spoiled the biblicist idea that they proved the finery of the Solomonic Age. A small shrine at Tanit is built on hardcore that contains pots dateable to the latter half of the eighth century by comparison with Greek pottery. Since it is built in the earliest layers of a Phœnician Tophet, a depository for the urns of infant sons offered in sacrifice to the gods, it is secure evidence of it having been founded early—tophets were particularly sacred to the Phœnicians, and were set up at the start of every city founded. Pottery found there is also found in Tyre dated to the late eighth century.

The tradition that Carthage was founded about a hundred years earlier is either the exaggeration typical of early history already noted or is because Carthage is the Phœnician for “New Town”. As the Phœnicians expanded they founded more than one New Town but those nearer home had their names changed later in history or disappeared. Carthage is the one that became famous but was not the first. Kition in Cyprus was earlier founded as a Carthage, and the classical tradition might have transferred from this to the famous Carthage.

The range of dates offered for the conquest of Israel by different biblical experts is 2300 BC to 1150 BC. This is not history and it is not science. It shows that the choices are entirely arbitrary—they have nothing substantial enough to support them. They are foolish attempts to find historical roots in biblical myth.

There is nothing sacrosanct in a date, so it beggars belief that supposed scientists will defy all evidence and logic and will blatantly lie and deceive to maintain an accepted set of dates. It is not the dates that are sacrosanct, it is the implication for the truth of the bible itself that is at stake. Abandoning the biblicists’ absurdly high dates for Palestine would get rid of the whole spurious period when early Israelite history—the mythical history—supposedly occurs, closing up a nasty dark age in Palestine archaeology. Even the champion of latter-day chronology revisers, Peter James, sneers at the idea of eliminating the empire of Solomon from history and firmly classifying it with Hans Anderson:

The rising school of “minimalists” within biblical scholarship are attempting to scotch the historicity of the Bible, claiming that Saul, David, Solomon and the early kings of Israel are merely fictitious characters.

Quite so. P John Crowe, who has written a useful review of misdating from a catastrophist’s viewpoint, writes:

That Sesostris was Tuthmoses III finds support from Homer, who tells us that Memnon (Amenophis III), was at Troy some 70-90 years after the death of Solomon.

We can take his point, but that a man speaking of false dating can tell us Homer wrote about Solomon does not give us confidence!

Save Time—Cut Mythology from history!					
Conventional Egyptian Chronology					
...18th D'sty	19th D'sty	20th D'sty	Third Intermediate Period...		
1300	1200	1100	1000	900	800
Conventional Palestine Chronology					
...LBA—Slavery	Moses,	Judges	David,	Divided	

		Josh			Sol'n	M'chy
1300	1200	1100	1000	900	800	
Revised Egyptian Chronology						
...18th Dynasty					19th D'sty	20th T I P...
1300	1200	1100	1000	900	800	
Revised Palestine Chronology—Mythical Elements Eliminated						
...Palestine an Egyptian Colony				Patriarchies		Bet Omri
1300	1200	1100	1000	900	800	

Among the most common foreign objects found in Palestine suitable for dating are Egyptian scarabs of the nineteenth and twentieth dynasties of 1300 to 1100 BC. Adjusted, these dates would be about 1000 to 800 BC, fitting perfectly the time when the small kingdoms of southern Canaan, including Israel, briefly flourished as colonies of Egypt, or independently before being swamped by Assyria. At present, it is the need for this gap to accommodate Moses, Joshua, the Judges, Saul, David and Solomon that perpetuates the faulty and lunatic chronology of the biblical archaeologists. The references in the el-Amarna letters To the *country* of Jerusalem and its *capital city*, Salem or bit Shalmi, make more sense in the eleventh century than in the fourteenth, and readily give a basis for the legend of Solomon (Salem, Shalmi).

Solomon's (960-920 BC) stables at Megiddo were ascribed by Kathleen Kenyon to Omri (886-875 BC) who has the advantage for historians as opposed to novelists of being mentioned in history in external records. The Solomonic Gates found at Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer, were exulted by Yigael Yadin and William Dever as confirmation of the bible (1 Kgs 9:15-17). Israel Finkelstein, an admirable scientist and scholar, conceded that Yadin had nothing to go on in the 1950s except the bible:

The only way for Yadin to establish an absolute chronology was to look at the Bible. There was no other way in the 1950s.

Regrettably, identical gates turned up in Lachish, not said to have been Solomonic in the bible, and even at Ashdod in Philistia. These gateways were questioned by Finkelstein and other archaeologists of Tel Aviv university in the 1980s and redated to about 800, much to Dever's annoyance.

Dever persists that archaeologists reject these new dates on ceramic typological grounds, but notes also they "have robbed the supposed Solomonic kingdom of much of its architectural basis". But, for all their fortified gates, these were primitive towns not grand ones as Solomon should have had. None of them have revealed the least sign of opulence—no monuments, statues, art, gold or silver items, or jewels. Solomon's buddy in Phœnicia, Hiram, was in the same boat—neither had one! There are no grand remains in Phœnicia dateable to the same time either. The Ahiram tomb is dated in the tenth century but had artifacts associated with it that had cartouches

of Rameses II, 300 years earlier. The latter date prevailed creating the remarkable historic fact that Hebrew writing was in use before Moses had escaped from Egypt.

B Rothenburg excavated the site of “Solomon’s Pillars” in the Timna Valley at Wadi Arabah. The consensus was that the site and other copper workings in the area were King Solomon’s Mines—copper mines. Y Aharoni had dated the site from pottery to the “time of Solomon” in the tenth century. Rabbi Nelson Glueck, a well known biblicist of the W F Albright school of credulity, made out that Solomon had a vast industry just east of Eilat. It all turned out to be biblicist fancy. Rothenburg, contrary to his hopes, found the workings were Egyptian, a temple of Sethos I and one of Rameses III.

One cannot but wonder how it comes about that pottery, thus dated in 1962 (to Solomon), is now so unequivocally transferred to the periods of Sethos I and Rameses III.

Donald Harden, Director of the London Museum

After that, the local people used the temple as a shrine but it yielded only one item, the ancient fertility symbol of the Middle East, a tiny moulded copper serpent with a gilded head, calling to mind the “serpent of brass” which the bible admits was the object of veneration of the Israelites, given them by Moses himself (*Num* 21:9). Thereafter, there is nothing in the ground until the Byzantine period.

Museums have many examples of artefacts of similar styles and manufacturing techniques dated by as much as 1000-1500 years differently. These anachronisms had arisen by archaeologists arbitrarily adding “occupation gaps” of many centuries that increased the age of the lower strata. The justification they offered was to match a biblical date for Abraham contemporary with the Amorite king, Hammurabi. Occupation gaps, remember, are not just gaps—they leave signs of desolation—so this is plain and straightforward dishonesty.

Excuse upon excuse is made for the mismatches in chronology but, like the multitude of excuses that Christians like to find to explain anomalies in the bible, they become utterly unconvincing by their sheer number. In scientific terms, they are contrary to *Occam’s Razor* or the principle of parsimonious explanation. Like Ptolemy’s epicycles, they will have to be discarded eventually in favour of something better. There was no need to accept the absurd dates in the first place—they were forced on to us by dogma. A simple revision of chronology removes most of the problems. Inevitably new ones will be introduced—nothing is perfect—but the revision will give a better synchronicity with other finds and events than at present.

It would be entirely possible to program even a modest computer to accept data about artefacts and fixed points with reasonable error bands and minimize the sum of squared differences between the synchronisms, automatically producing the best fit of the synchronisms to a set timescale based on the evidence. Has anyone attempted such an approach?

## Dating Some Pharaohs

The key date in this falsification of the chronologies of ancient Egypt, Israel, and Mesopotamia is the year 925 BC, supposedly the year when Shoshenq I, founder of the Egyptian twenty second dynasty invaded the Judah of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, an event recorded in the bible, the Pharaoh being called Shishak. Champollion thought he had found “Judah the Kingdom” among the hieroglyphs of subdued cities listed in

Sheshonq I's military campaign mural. He concluded that Sheshonq was the Biblical Pharaoh Shishak. Shoshenq is dated to this time to match the biblical Shishak, so history is being dated from the bible! As the editor of Biblical Archaeology admits:

The calculated beginning of the twenty first Dynasty stems from the equating of the twentieth year of Shoshenq I with the fifth year of Rehoboam.

Jeremy Hughes, an Oxford chronologist, confirms it, though he thinks the date was 932 BC:

Egyptian chronologists, without always admitting it, have commonly based their chronology of this period on the Biblical synchronism for Shoshenq's invasion.

A Harvard authority on biblical chronology, William Barnes adds:

Apart from the biblical synchronism with Rehoboam (which remains problematic at best) there is no other external synchronism by which one might date his reign, and the Egyptian chronological data themselves remain too fragmentary to permit chronological precision.

By 1888, Champollion's "Judah the Kingdom" had been corrected and associated geographically with northern Israel not Judah. Though the link had gone, Shishak remained Sheshonq. From Shoshenq to Psamtik I in 664 BC, Egyptian chronology is almost as imaginary as the bible—it is the remainder of the Third Intermediary Period—invading Nubians, duplicate pharaohs and nonentities. And what are we to make of the curious fact that the name of Shishak in the *Septuagint* is "Susakim" which means "One of the Susa People"—Persians!

Pharaoh Takelot I, Kenneth Kitchen describes as a "witless nonentity who allowed all real power to slip through his fumbling fingers", because he is only known through a genealogical note. Yet Kitchen gives him 15 years. Takelot I will have left no monuments, not because he was witless, but because he died after reigning only a few months or even not at all, being a regent or even just a viceroy. Most of the kings of the twenty second and twenty third dynasties have peculiar non-Egyptian names. Libyans, we are told, yet the names sound Assyrian—Osorkon is Sargon, the Assyrian king who claimed to have brought Egypt under his control, and Takelot is Tiglath—and suddenly these Assyrian names pop up repeatedly over a period of 200 years. Are they viceroys of the Assyrian kings? Victorian Egyptologists thought so. Manetho's dynasties might not have been listed in chronological order. He might have put foreigners last, after the foreign Hyksos.

Kitchen claims that his date for Shoshenq I is supported by "the series of known regnal years of his successors, which fill up the interval 924-712 BC almost completely, leaving just 18 years for the one king (Osorkon IV) whose reign is poorly documented in terms of monumental year-dates". Many of these "known" regnal years are not known, as the aforementioned Takelot I proves, and no one knows that they were all consecutive and none were concurrent. So, Kitchen assigns various kings enough years to fill the spurious gap, and, Lo! he finds the gap filled.

The "Genealogy of the Royal Architects" suggest a date for Shoshenq I sometime in the 9th century BC, a hundred years later than convention. From Phœnician findings, Shoshenq is better dated to the beginning of the eighth century. Abibaal of Byblos reigned just three generations before Tiglath-pileser III, and was a



contemporary of Shoshenq I putting Shoshenq about 825 BC. Presents from Shoshenq and his son Osorkon were inscribed by respectively, Abibaal and Elibaal, successive rulers of Byblos. The son of Elibaal, Shipitbaal is known from Assyrian annals to have ruled about 740 BC.

Release Shoshenq from Shishak and he can appear in the eighth instead of the tenth century BC, and Omri can emerge as the true founder of the Israelite state. The Merenptah Stele abuts on to Omri, and might suggest a failed but boasted-about punitive expedition to put the rebel king, or his rebellious predecessors, in his place. It also more closely abuts on to the Mesha of Moab Stone. The adherence of scholars to the bible as true history is a lunacy that they cannot cure easily. Loosing their cherished beliefs in the word of God, they might be able to cope with, but looking utter idiots is unthinkable.

Even Peter James writes disparagingly that it is easy to dismiss the biblical narrative as unbelievable, but says it is “poor methodology”. In fact, it is poor methodology to believe that devotional works are true history when they are written to promote particular religious prejudices. The scientific method is to disbelieve until a sound basis for belief has been established. It is not a sound basis of belief that something is “plausible”, as biblicists tell us the scriptural account is. *Gone with the Wind* is plausible—but it is not true.

James also writes that the identification of “Apiru”, a name that occurs in diplomatic correspondence, with “Hebrew” can hardly be doubted. That too is poor methodology because it begs the question. It *can* be doubted. The scientific historian should not make assumptions like this based on the evidence that “it can hardly be doubted”. Reducing ancient dates around 1200 BC by 300 years gives much more credence to the idea that Apiru = Hebrew, but establishing the identity will then become evidence for the need to redate.

Shishak could have been Shoshenq, read by the Persians in the Assyrian annals and translated into a Pharaoh of the time of the legendary Solomon, but this is not history! Alternatively, the revisionists think he could have been a reference to Rameses III, known as Sysw (Shisha) on his own monuments. The added “k” makes the name a pun on the word “assaulter” in Hebrew. A revised chronology would place Sysw in the latter half of the tenth century BC, a few decades before Omri (Khumri) founded the state of Israel. It is therefore in just that period when Solomon was supposed to have lived, but the dates of this Rameses are entirely arbitrary, and there are unexplained signs that he is later still.

David Rohl has found a rare synchronism in the reign of the eighteenth Dynasty Pharaoh, Akhenaten. Shortly after the death of his father Amenhotep III, Akhenaten received a letter from his vassal Abimilku of Tyre saying a fire had destroyed half of the palace of King Nikmaddu II at the city of Ugarit. Archaeologists found, in the remains of the palace, a tablet describing an eclipse of the sun at sunset in the month of “Hiyaru” (mid-April to mid-May). The setting sun (Salem) was divine in the Canaanite pantheon, so its eclipse seemed a bad omen—the reverse of the tablet declared it was. Calculations confirm that thirty minutes before sunset on 9 May 1012 BC an eclipse *did* occur, the only significant eclipse of the sun, within an hour of sunset, visible in the Levant in the second millennium BC. The combination of circumstances date Akhenaten near the turn of the millennium, not 300 years before!

From the el Amarna tablets, Rohl thinks the ethnic and political makeup of Palestine, and the activities of the Apiru correspond with the Biblical record. He identifies Saul with a character in the letters called Labayu, and he thinks other events mentioned therein can be matched with the careers of Saul and David. A “Dadua”, the

Akkadian version of David, is even mentioned, with no special significance. When biblicists realize that it is a way to save their beloved David, they will become chronology revisers!

## The Hittites

The many tablets found at el Amarna and at Hattusas show that pharaohs and Hittite kings were in correspondence. Current chronology suggests the Hittites flourished from the fifteenth to the thirteenth century BC, disappearing about 1175 BC. Von Soden (*The Ancient Orient*) says that, with the destruction of Hattusas, cuneiform fell out of use in the Hittite world, including in Syria, but it was reintroduced by the Assyrians about 850 BC, when, the Assyrians are found corresponding with Hittites in north Syria who had the same hieroglyphic script and had the same culture but existed from the tenth to the eighth centuries! This looks like the same phony dark age. Assyrian dates are reliable from about 900 BC onwards. Assyrian art, distinctive as it was, influenced the countries subdued and associated with the great empire. These countries closely linked with Assyria can therefore be dated reasonably well by comparisons with Assyria. Earlier than the tenth century, Assyrians mention encountering Hittite soldiers but seem unaware of the great Hittite kingdom in Anatolia.

Excavations at the Syrian town of Carchemish place it entirely in the first millennium BC. Leonard Woolley found sherds of Mycenaean and Cypriot ware on a ninth century pavement. Another link was an apparent reference to pharaoh Rameses II on a mace head. Seventh century layers revealed winged discs identical to specimens from supposed thirteenth century Hattusas. The figures at Carchemish were little gold figures like brooches and the excuse for the discrepancy in the dates is that the small figures were hieroglyphs—kept for 500 years, apparently.

The city of Malatya has an Assyrian palace built on top of a late Hittite complex built on an earlier (but still late) Hittite structure. The neo-Hittite complex had a lion gate carbon dated by charcoal found beneath it to the early tenth century BC. In style it matches independently dated art at Carchemish. Yet all of these are in the same style as the supposed thirteenth century art of Hattusas in central Anatolia. The neo-Hittite complex is apparently identical in style to the imperial Hittite buildings of 300 years earlier.

More remarkably, the kings of Malatya can be linked with the kings of Imperial Hattusas. The so-called kings of Carchemish unearthed by Woolley were apparently local officials treated as vassal “kings”, under the authority of the Great King. A stele from the temple of the storm god at Carchemish confirms that the Great Kings of the Hittites still existed in the ninth century.

The Phrygians arrived in Anatolia in the ninth century, apparently as wild invaders similar to the Cimmerians. But excavations show that at Gordion, where Alexander was to cut the Gordion Knot, Phrygians and Hittites lived together, although the Phrygians gradually displaced the Hittites, until the Cimmerians plundered the city. It suggests a gradual break up of the Hittite kingdom in the latter half of the tenth century, so that Phrygians were able to move in in strength in the ninth.

Cyprus, according to the bible, ruled by Hiram of Tyre in the tenth century BC was not occupied by the Phoenicians until the eighth. The earlier Cypriots had an unusual and still undeciphered script that disappeared about 1200 BC. Old scripts do die out, but this one reappeared again about 900 BC! How can a script be unused for 300 years then resume in use as if it had never stopped? Answer—it cannot.

## Divided Monarchy

The “Divided Monarchy” of Israel and Judah begins to find confirmation in Assyrian archives and suggests that the historical scriptures from this point on show that the authors’ had access to Assyrian diplomatic records and king lists. It does not mean that the content of each king’s reign is anything other than romance meant to show Israelites as perpetual apostates to bring them in line behind the god, Yehouah. It does not even prove that the monarchy was divided—Yehud (Judah) might have been an invention of the Persians and the north Syrian state of Yaudi might have been confused with the later Yehud.

From about the ninth century there seems to have been a kingdom of Israel, but it was destroyed by the Assyrians after a life of less than two centuries and repopulated with people from north Syria, some of whom possibly came from the kingdoms of Yaudi and Samal, others from Haran. Several kings of Israel and some kings of Judah appear in Mesopotamian records but there are no monuments or inscriptions from Palestine that mention these kings. Only the stele of Mesha of Moab mentions an Israelite king—Omri.

Valuable Assyrian glass is sometimes found in Palestine. The tyro archaeologist would take it that the strata containing it should be dated to the Assyrian period. No! They are uniformly dated as preceding the Assyrian period. They were imports, the experts say, yet curiously, the imports ceased when Samaria came within the Assyrian sphere, and the glass became more accessible.

Some seals have been found but they are never found in context! One seal mentions Hezekiah and another Jeroboam (II). The only seal found in context mentions Jehoiachin who was supposed to have ruled briefly in 597 BC, but the context of this seal was pottery from before the Assyrian conquest, over 100 years before! The implication is that Judah never existed independently of Israel and was brought down with Israel by the Assyrians.

The excavation of Samaria caused problems. It was expected to have been founded in the ninth century, by Omri, and to be built therefore on ground that had tenth century remains. Pottery found in the ground was also found in the casement walls, but whereas the pottery in the ground was mixed with identifiably older material, as would be expected, the walls only contained the pottery, that must, therefore, have been contemporaneous with the building, as Kathleen Kenyon realized. The pottery was ninth century, offering no trouble to the date of the building but it was the same pottery that was dated at Hazor and Megiddo by Egyptian chronology to the twelfth century.

An example of exaggerated dating is possibly the temple at Arad excavated by Y Aharoni. It was not of the type of Solomon’s temple described in the bible, but Aharoni dated its foundation “in Solomon’s reign” (tenth century), and attributed changes to the reforming kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, the latter actually closing it in the seventh century. More recently, critics of Aharoni disagree considerably. The temple was, they think, only founded about the time of Hezekiah, and it is unlikely to have been closed so soon after by Josiah. Closure sometime in the Persian period when worship was centralised in Jerusalem is more likely.

## Post-Exilic Period

A more surprising dark age is the one that occurs in Judah after the exile and the supposed return of Zerubabel and Joshua. The gap is almost a century until Nehemiah and Ezra get active from the middle of the fifth century on, although nothing much is known from archaeology for hundreds of years after even this. Was this dark age real or was it a product of biblicist chronology? In the early twentieth century, there had been sites attributed from its pottery to this interval but Albright and his school reclassified them all as pre-exilic. Albright himself noted that it “left something of a void behind”. Such scholarship begins to look deliberately perverse.

B S J Isserlin (*The Israelites*, 1998) says the pottery chronology developed between the wars by W F Albright, and elaborated by R Amiram is still the basic standard. Since Albright paid little or no regard to the “void” he had created in post-“exilic” period, the continuing use of this standard must be perpetuating error, and is even more perverse than the original crime. The error is that much of the pottery of the Persian period is assigned to the Assyrian period with an error of at least 200 years.

Lachish was devastated by the Assyrians and remained unoccupied until the time of Nehemiah when he says it had a remnant of Israel. Excavation at Lachish revealed a set of ostraca written in Hebrew script—the oldest examples known. They were letters from a local commander, Hoshai to his general, Yaosh. They were found in a burnt layer (level II) immediately beneath the mid-fifth century Persian layer.

A biblicist declared that, to judge by the names, the letters were written at the time of Jeremiah. This misled researchers for decades until a closer look showed that the names actually fitted the post-exilic period better. One clue to this is obvious if it is accepted that the Persians promoted the name Saviour because they claimed to be saviours of people and gods. Both Hoshai and Yaosh include the word “Saviour”.

Unarguable evidence however is that one of the letters actually relates events found in the book of Nehemiah, speaking of a “servant of the king” (“servant” in *Nehemiah*) called Tobiad. The destroyed layer at Lachish therefore must have been caused by internal dissent under the Persian governor in Persian times and not at the conquest of the Assyrians as had been thought.

The next layer (Level III) at Lachish is also burnt but, from various seals, seems to be dateable to the conquest by Nebuchadnezzar. The Assyrian Palace Ware, as Petrie had called it, was shown to be neo-Babylonian, not Assyrian, so these strata previously assigned to the end of the eighth century were actually from the sixth. This fits in with the Archaic Greek pottery found in north Palestine. That leaves Level IV as the layer of the Assyrian conquest and that one was not incinerated. Assyrian records do not claim that Lachish was burnt and it makes more sense for them to have left the town in the care of their vassals, the Philistines, as a fortress against the Egyptians.

The corollary is that the Assyrian conquests have to be found in strata previously assigned to the ninth century. It is another of those curiosities of biblical archaeology that clearly Assyrian objects offering the chance of unequivocal dates, never come from careful excavations but from disturbed ground or rubbish pits. It is all dubious, casting a poor light on the honesty of people who excavate with their bibles instead of scrapers. A century ago, an Assyrian tablet with a precisely identifiable date of 651 BC was found by Macalister in layers he preferred to date in the “time of Solomon”. Pottery of an identifiably Assyrian style is commonly found in strata dated two centuries before Tiglath-Pileser came a-conquering in 733 BC. All of this matches the misdating of Cypriot black on red ware.

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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 6. Dating

## Dating Ancient Near Eastern History (Part III)

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If an excavator believes from the scriptures that an ancient mound must contain buildings from Solomon's reign, it is almost certain that sooner or later he will find structures that fit the bill. The spurious air of biblical authority given to such a discovery can then make the identification stick, despite any evidence to the contrary. In the meantime a small tourist industry may even have grown up around this "confirmation" of the Bible.

*Peter James*

### Revising the Chronology

The debates on biblical chronology among biblical archaeologists of the last two decades of the twentieth century have been vigorous but mainly on the best adjustment to the dating of Albright in the twenties and thirties. William G Dever of Arizona university seems satisfied with this, while others would say that Albright made a pig's ear out of biblical archaeology.

For the Bronze Age, we are now debating issues regarding a century or so, usually much less, and dependent as always on the synchronisms with astronomically fixed Egyptian chronology.

William G Dever

The chronology of the Iron Age remains fixed within rather narrow margins by Egyptian and Mesopotamian synchronisms, together with biblical data.

William G Dever

For Dever, there is no room here for doubt, yet we have seen there is a great deal of room for doubting Egyptian chronology in this time and room enough for doubting Assyrian dates before the eighth century. As for speaking about astronomically fixed Egyptian chronology, presumably meaning the Sothic system, it is utterly discredited. Dever claims that the raid of the mysterious Pharaoh Shishak biblically dated to about 925 BC is confirmed by destruction layers at two dozen sites that can be precisely dated. Since Dever seems not to know what "precise" as opposed to "relative" means, he must mean that destruction layers are found at a particular common stratum that might correspond to the biblical mention of Shishak, if you believe the bible. We are back to the sort of dubious correlationism that Albright used often to date the non-existent conquest by Joshua. It is about the right time, it is a destruction as we expect, so it must be the event that we expect. He also denies that there is any doubt about the excavations of Jericho, even writing, "What excavation?" He, lastly, denies that any archaeologists use calculations of dates based on biblical chronology "at all".

The chronology of Israel worked out from its own internal relativities and keyed into Babylonian and Assyrian anchor points suggests a shortening of dates by at least two centuries. The Iron Age then coincides with the setting up of the statelets of Palestine in the ninth century, not with any invasion of the Israelites from the south. All the evidence is that people came into Palestine from the north or east not from the south.

The nineteenth and twentieth dynasties in the Egyptian scheme correspond with the end of the Bronze Age. If these are put forward by two or three hundred years, then voids in the historical data disappear. Nubian specialists see continuity from the twentieth dynasty to the twenty fifth Nubian dynasty even though in the conventional scheme there are four dynasties between them. It seems to be this two century gap that is wrong. These dynasties are in the so-called Third Intermediate Period—the very name implies doubt and indecision—stretching from 1070 to 664 BC in orthodox terms. It is a 400 year period full of kings that no one knows anything about and whose reigns are often given arbitrary values.

Ken (Dodd) Kitchen, the humorist who knows all there is to know about king David, is one of the modern scholars to perpetuate this travesty, devised to keep a neat space for his heroes David and Solomon. To magnify Solomon and to justify his impossible success, the scholars build an artificial void in Egyptian history literally full of ruling nonentities.

### **Third Intermediate Period**

After the twentieth dynasty, Egypt must have had problems. Libyans began flooding into the country, not as conquerors but apparently as refugees fleeing famine in north Africa. The organisation of the social order weakened and priests and feudal lords set themselves up as local rivals to the pharaoh. By 666 BC, the Assyrians under Ashurbanipal could say that Egypt was ruled by 20 kings. The Greeks made it 12. Even Eusebius, who preserved part of Manetho's king list, admitted that the kings in this period were not all consecutive but that some ruled locally. Psamtik I (640-610 BC) united the country once more. Who are these kings in the present reconstructions?

Merely to give this brief account suggests that the dynasties listed by the Egyptologists as consecutive were not, or did not even exist in such difficult times. The high priests of Amun are listed separately, evidently as rulers in Thebes, but not constituting a dynasty. The twenty third dynasty is accepted as overlapping the twenty second. It seems also that the twenty second and twenty third dynasties overlapped the start of the twenty fifth, and the twenty fifth and twenty sixth dynasties also overlapped. Kitchen allows small degrees of overlap but keeps the scheme essentially intact even though the twenty third dynasty is nothing but a depository of otherwise undateable kings. Between Yuput I and Yuput II is a half century of "kings".

The 400 years of the Third Intermediate Period has chunks of time when nothing seems to happen at all, no monuments, architecture, art or statuary—social breakdown is always the excuse, but nothing happening never happens. There is little to show a Libyan influence. Indeed the artistic styles are continuous with the Ramesides. The twenty first dynasty is placed as consecutive with the twenty second but scarcely anything is known about the earlier dynasty compared with the later one. Nothing outside Egypt testifies to the twenty first dynasty. Were they really just a single dynasty that had divided responsibility between two branches?

Jonathan Wade, who defends the orthodox chronology with the vigour of a witchfinder general at his site called [Waste of Time](#), gives the following table listing the Southern Viziers of Egypt from the 21st to the 25th dynasties. His point seems to be that the list is complete and consecutive allowing no space for a concurrent dynasty with the 21st without creating concurrent southern viziers.



Date	Vizier	
c 1075	Herihor	
c 1070	Pinudjem I	
c 1040	Amenhirpamesha	
c 960	Neseramun A	
c 930	Padimut A	
c 925	Ia-o	
c 880	Rudpamut	
c 876	Hor[y]	Year 14 Takeloth I
c 845	Hori son of Iutjek	
c 835	Nesipakashuty A	
c 825	Harsiese D, son of Nesipakashuty A	
c 820	Hor xviii	
c 815	Pentyefankh, son of Hor xviii	Year 8 Pedubast I
c 790	Harsiese E	Yr 39 Shoshenq III
c 780	Djed-Khons-ef-ankh E	
c 775	Naktefmut C	Year 11 of ?? Married daughter Takeloth II
c 770	Hor x, son of Naktefmut C	Contemporary of Osorkon III
c 765	Pamiu	
c 760	Pakharu, son of Pamiu	Married daughter of Takeloth III
c 755	Ankh-Osorkon	
c 750	Pediamontet, son of Pamiu	
c 745	Harsiese F	
c 740	Nesmin A, Son of above	
c 730	Ankh-hor	Contemporary of Piankhi
c 725	Nesipaqashuty B	Married daughter of Takeloth III
c 720	Pediese, son of Harsiese F	
c 715	Khamhor A, son of Harsiese F	Grandfather of Montemhat 4 PA
c 700	Pahrer, son of Khamhor A	
c 690	Nesmin B, son Khamhor A	

c 680	Nesipaqashuty C	
c 670	Nespamedu A, son of Nesipaqashuty C	
c 660	Nesipaqashuty D, son of Nespamedu A	Yr 14 Psamtek
c 650	Iry	

Certain features of this table will strike the interested observer.

1. There are only three southern viziers (mean term of office, ~35 years) in the 130 year extent of the 21st dynasty, when there were seven pharaohs (mean reign, ~19 years).
2. There are 24 southern viziers (mean term of office, ~10 years) in the 230 year period of the 22nd dynasty, when there were ten pharaohs (mean reign, ~23 years).
3. There are 16 southern viziers (mean term of office, ~7 years) in the 110 year period of the 25th Nubian dynasty, when there were six pharaohs (mean reign, ~18 years).

The mean period that each Pharaoh reigns is roughly the same but the viziers became much less permanent as time went on. While it is plain that such variations are statistically possible, they are the sort of thing that should make a scientist suspicious, because they might indicate that the lists were not truly consecutive, just as the revisionists think.

With some accepted overlap, the Pharaohs reigned 18 years on average while the viziers held office typically for 12 years, but Amenhirpamesha was in office for 80 years! Is this true? The figures suggest there is something wrong with the lists.

## Puzzles of Egyptian Chronology

A twenty second dynasty mummy found intruding into a cache of mummies sealed in the twenty first dynasty suggests an overlap of dynasties. The tombs of twenty first dynasty Psusennes II and twenty second dynasty Osorkon II are built next to each other and so close that a wall of the tomb of Osorkon had to be chiselled away to make room for the tomb of Psusennes. Yet Psusennes was supposed to have lived 100 years before! The excuse is that Osorkon used an empty tomb built before Psusennes built his, but Psusennes could have used the empty tomb if it already stood in the way of the tomb that he eventually built. Further investigation shows intimate family links between the two lists supporting the idea that they ruled in parallel.

The strongest evidence, ignored by those desperate to hang on to conventional chronology, is provided by the absence of burials of the Apis Bull in the twenty first and twenty second dynasties. The average age of the bulls was 18 years and there should therefore have been about 12 in the two dynasties. None, or possibly only one, are known. If no bulls were buried but worship of the Apis Bull continued, as it must have, then these two dynasties must have overlapped with another.

Two objects clearly of the reign of Soshenq I, founder of the twenty second dynasty, have been found in Palestine. As objects difficult for biblicists always are, they were unstratified. One of these had been inscribed

by a Phoenician king for whom it was evidently a gift from the king of Egypt. It seems to have been a custom because another gift, a bust of Soshenq's son, Osorkon I, was also found inscribed by another Phoenician king. These two important finds not only link two Egyptian kings with two contemporary Phoenician kings, but allow the Canaanite script to be compared with scripts elsewhere like that on the stele of Mesha of Moab.

Moreover, the Phoenician kings can be identified as part of a series ending in a king dateable from Assyrian tribute tablets as 740 BC. The two previous kings were the ones contemporaneous with Soshenq I and Osorkon I. These two kings can therefore be firmly dated at about 800 BC not 150 years earlier. The proto-Canaanite script is also dated to the same time not the eleventh century as the biblicalists want. It therefore matches the Greek alphabet of the eighth century.

A jar found in Assur belonging to the wife of Sennacherib (701-681 BC) is of a similar style to a bowl found in a tomb in Tanis and attributed to Psusennes, 300 years before. The Saite Oracle Papyrus, dated to 651 BC in the reign of Psamtik is remarkably similar to the Rameside style of 400 years before. Instances of supposed eleventh or tenth century objects turning up with eighth century ones are not rare, but they are usually judged in favour of the high date to leave space for the Israelites. It is time they were properly dated to the eighth century and the Egyptian chronology corrected to match. Then the early "history" of the Israelites can be seen as myths.

Peter James has the twentieth dynasty starting in 950 BC not 1185 BC and ending about the time of Soshenq I in 810 BC instead of 1070 BC. The twenty first dynasty was part of the twenty second and operated in parallel. The effect is that at least 260 spurious years (1070 to 810 BC) can be taken out of the Egyptian chronology, and this brings into alignment many confusing datings in various parts of the Near East, and even further afield. Through misdating, some kings have appeared twice, like Osorkon IV, who is really Osorkon III, and further adjustments on these lines could bring down the dates even more.

In the century of the twenty first dynasty, P John Crowe explains:

1. the country was divided,
2. no king was sole ruler of Egypt,
3. temple priests acted as local governors, ruled their local areas and maintained the temples,
4. an anonymous "Great King of the North" is mentioned on monuments,
5. a mysterious "renaissance era" of double dating starts to appear, and
6. no national armies, foreign campaigns or attempts at reunification are mentioned.

The obvious interpretation is that Egypt was a vassal of the Great King of the north.

Did Rameses III rule during the Persian period? Immanuel Velikovsky thought Rameses III, who was never in the twentieth dynasty of Manetho, was the pseudonym of the fourth century pharaoh, Nectanebo, a full 800 year adjustment. Velikovsky is derided as a crank but derision does not answer questions. Consider his arguments. F L Griffiths and E Naville, both reputable archaeologists, excavating in the 1880s at Tell-el-Yahudiyeh, near Cairo, found faience tiles from the palace of Rameses III some of which seemed to have Greek letters on the back of them, taken to be potters' marks. Conventionally Rameses died in about 1150 BC, 400 years before Homer. In the necropolis they found tombs, some undisturbed, with painted coffins and rough hieroglyphs typical

of the Greek and Roman times. In the intact graves of two children they found scarabs of Rameses III and his father Setnakht. Griffiths said the scarabs were twelfth century, while Naville said the tombs had to be fourth century and the scarabs were heirlooms. Neither thought it possible that the mysterious Rameses was himself fourth century.

The pylon of Rameses III at Medinet Habu—a pristine temple for its putative age—is in a remarkably similar style to Ptolemaic pylons at Edfu and Kom Ombo, 800 years later—but looks newer! Egyptologists tell us that the Nectanebos, who fought off Persians, first without, then later with Greek support, described by Diodorus of Sicily, the Greek historian, was Nekhtorheb, but this king's monuments make no such claims. He was an unusually modest Pharaoh, unless the reliefs of Rameses III at Medinet Habu which show battle scenes of Egyptians and “Prst” defeating Libyans, and of Egyptians and apparently Greek allies fighting off the “Prst.” Finally the Egyptians defeat both Greeks and Persians in alliance.

Persians are “Prstt” in the trilingual Ptolemaic Canopus decree. Other Egyptian texts identify Persia as “Prs”. Persian soldiers with headgear like “Prst” at Medinet Habu appear on the monuments at Persepolis. The Persians also uniquely provided for camp followers and wagons of women and children are shown on the battle murals. Conventionally these are the families of the migrant “Sea Peoples.” later the Philistines. The improbability of wagon loads of women, children, grannies and family belongings being carried a thousand miles round the coast from Ionia over mountains in Southern Turkey and through the countries of hostile people while the chaps sail their ships offshore is never observed upon.

Breasted tells us that Rameses III said of his enemy, “the Pereset are hung up... in their towns...” What can this damaged inscription mean? The Persians used to hang people—it was crucifixion. If however the expression just means trapped or delayed in their towns, then what were “their towns?” These are supposed to have been unsettled people, but they had evidently settled somewhere north of Egypt already. Egyptologists say the “Prst” were not Persians but Philistines, and they are convinced of this from... the bible! Yet the bible mentions none of this.

In 1979, at Tell el Daba in the Eastern Delta, M Bitak reported Rameses III remains immediately below the Ptolemaic strata, and in 1980, the linen wrapping of a mummy firmly dated to the reign of Setnakht, the Pharaoh who preceded Rameses III was C-14 dated to 345 BC +/- 75 years, according to a Canadian journal. E A Wallis Budge says Nekhtaneb was a Horus name of Rameses III. The plausible explanation is that Nebo was a Babylonian God acceptable to the Persians and his name was given to Nectanebos (Nebo Conquers) as their puppet, but he gained military prowess with Persian help fighting off Libyans then turned on the Persians themselves first with the mercenary Greeks as allies then fighting both Greeks and Persians. Rameses had become a title of honour just as Caesar and Ptolemy did. Nectanebo apparently took the title for himself to describe his military successes.

It is not for us to uphold Velikovsky, far fetched as he seems, against the scholarship of the Egyptologists, but they show no inclination to be bothered about all these puzzles, unlikely coincidences and anachronisms. They ought to be. These questions should be properly addressed and not ignored. [Discussion.](#)

## **A Chronological Revolution?**

Chris Bennett, in a [staunch defence](#) of conventional TIP chronology complains of the “swingeing rhetorical attacks on the hidebound Egyptological establishment who are held to be incapable of seeing the obvious wisdom of the new theories because of their purblind and musty academic vision.” The British Museum, confirming this false mockery, banned a revisionist book from the BM Bookstore. Yet, though Bennett’s review of Egyptian evidence favours conventional chronology, he admits:

It is possible that the standard chronology is wrong, even though no fatal logical contradictions have as yet been found... Synchronisms on which the current chronology rests are few in number and are not without difficulties of interpretation. The dated Sothic sighting which was once held to fix New Kingdom chronology is now widely discounted as not being a Sothic sighting at all. The lunar observations which date the reigns of Ramses II and Thutmose III admit multiple solutions, repeated in a 25-year cycle. Assur-uballit of Assyria does have a different father in the Amarna letters (Assur-nadin-ahhe II) from that given to Assur-uballit I in the kinglists (Eriba-Adad I). The Palestinian campaign of Shoshenq I does not match well with the Judean campaign of Shishak described in the Book of Kings.

Chris Bennett PhD, FAS, FSO

And these concessions are supported by further admissions that around half a century has recently been trimmed from older chronologies. This though is “fine tuning!”.

Revision of Egyptian chronology puts under particular attack Kenneth Kitchen’s *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt*, “which is widely regarded as one of the major intellectual achievements of modern Egyptology.” The new chronology of the Third Intermediate Period raised problems of identification. Kitchen in his genealogies assigned some important royal figures, like Shoshenq I in the Neseramon genealogy, Osorkon, and High Priests of Amun, entirely on the conventional chronology. Such assignments have to be re-thought to see whether they can fit the new paradigm.

Doubtless Kitchen has devoted a great deal of sweat to his endeavour, but, to judge by his intemperate language, his motivation has been to defend the conventional chronology and not to examine the evidence with any sort of critical eye or even objectivity. Kitchen’s irate response to the proposals for revision and his foolish attempts at irony in attacking his detractors make him sound like a religious nut-case who thinks he is defending God, not Egyptian dates. Kitchen, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, condemned the authors of *Centuries of Darkness* as “sons of Velikovsky,” intended as a shocking insult to any scientist, and wished them to “the same oblivion.” Who can believe such a man, despite his scholarship, if that is what it is? Graeme Barker of Leicester University, more honestly says:

Most regional specialists acknowledge that their local chronology is pretty shaky but assume that Egyptian chronology must be cast in stone, and it is salutary to find that things are not quite what they seem there either.

G W van Oosterhout in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* also admits “everyone with some knowledge of chronology knows that there are difficulties, but the accumulation of problems is truly disquieting... Evidently something is wrong with Egyptian chronology.” Even James Mellaart, who has been critical, is happy to admit that attention must be paid to the deficiencies of dating, and better dating methods found. Lord Colin Renfrew also is willing to recognize the “shaky nature” of our present dating, and thinks a chronological revolution could be coming—one

is inclined to think, not while so many religious bigots are in powerful places, though even some of *them* are ready to accept that the accepted chronology is shaky.

James K Hoffmeier, Professor of Archaeology & Old Testament at Wheaton College, Illinois, writes in *BAR* that the authors (of *Centuries of Darkness*) “have drawn attention to serious problems that cannot be ignored... The issues underscored should prompt the reassessment of all areas of Near Eastern chronology.” W H C Frend, Emeritus Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Glasgow University, says in the *Church Times*, “much may be said for bringing the end of the Mycenaean and Hittite eras some two centuries later than the traditional dating of 1150 BC.” Hyam Maccoby, Lecturer in Jewish History, Leo Baeck College, recognizes the problem of the chronological thumb suckers when he writes in *Midstream* that “it is inevitable that this book will arouse strong opposition from those wedded to the conventional chronology.” and he sounds approving when he adds that there is “an excellent case for scrapping the old chronology and substituting a new one”.

Aidan Dodson, himself an Egyptologist, writing in *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* speaks most sensibly when he says that scholars must “reconsider their chronologies from first principles, since it is only from this basis that any sound chronology can ever be maintained”.

### **Computer Matching Ancient Astronomical Records**

Wayne Mitchell, seeking to establish an absolute chronology for the ancient Near East, reviewed the records of ancient astronomers, particularly the extensive Kassite collection called *Enuma Anu Enlil* for Agade, Gutu/Uruk V, and Ur III, preserved in the library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC). To minimize any doubt, his analysis was based upon “observations for which there are very few date-assignment possibilities within a large span of time”.

P M Muller and F R Stephenson had classified ancient solar eclipse records according to their reliability. Only four were classed as truly reliable:

1. 7 July 709 BC—total eclipse at Chu-Fu
2. 26 September 322 BC—timed eclipse at Babylon
3. 4 March 181 BC—total eclipse at Ch’ang-An
4. 15 April 136 BC—total eclipse at Babylon.

Of these the last one is the most reliable of all, and two descriptions of it are known that agree with each other. This reliable date allowed the factor that applied to the deceleration of the earth’s rotation in the first millennium BC to be found. The rate of deceleration of the earth’s rotation varies but the extrapolation from the second century back two millennium is considerably less than the extrapolation of the present conditions back for four millennia.

Using computer programs taking account of the deceleration of the Earth’s rate of rotation, such as that used by P J Huber, and other modern analysts and statisticians, Mitchell found sensible matches later than any previously proposed. Strikingly, and with some certainty (a “rather probable solution”), the accession of king Ammi-saduga of the 1st Dynasty of Babylon was revised down from J A Brinkman’s 1646 BC to 1419 BC. It gives the least number of severe inaccuracies, calculating back, of three—or only one, depending on the precise



adjustment of the deceleration factor—and it matched those solutions yielding the “remarkable” coincidence of a lunar and solar eclipse in the succeeding reign of Samsu-ditana.

This finding confirmed that of Huber and co-workers, covering the period 1978 BC to 1363 BC, who also found that the accession of Ammi-saduga at 1419 BC gave the best fit with the data. Beginning from the accession date for Ammi-saduga, the period to the end of the Ur III Dynasty is 360 +/- 15 years, making 19 April 1793 BC the best candidate for the eclipse marking the end of the reign of Ib-bi-suen (Ibbisin, conventionally 2028-2004 BC). Another known eclipse marks the end of the reign of Shulgi (conventionally 2094-2047 BC), now dated to 31 July 1835 BC. From the accession of Ur-Nammu (conventionally 2112-2094 BC) now 1901 BC, the Du'uzu eclipse, associated with the victory of Utu-hegal, must have been 28 June 1908 BC.

The period from the fall of Agade to the start of Ur III is given precisely by Brinkman as 42 years, but really lies between 15 and 100 years. If the king-list of Gutium is accurate and the Gutian king, Sarlagab (1988-1983 BC) is the contemporary of Shar-kali-sharri of Agade (conventionally 2217-2193 BC), the lowest feasible chronology corresponds to the partial eclipse on the 25 April 2035 BC, which would mark the end of Rimush (conventionally 2278-2270 BC). The successive eclipses on the 27 March 1959 BC and the 16 March 1958 BC would then be the accurately dated end of Shar-kali-sharri.

Mitchell concludes that a satisfactory match for the accounts requires the accessions of Ammi-saduga and Ur-Nammu, respectively, to be 1419 BC and 1901 BC. From these, by historical interpolation, the accession of Hammurabi (conventionally 1792-1750 BC) is 1565 BC. If Hammurabi and Neferhotep I are contemporaries then the chronology of the Egyptian dynasties before Babylon I are clarified. Neferhotep (conventionally 1751-1740 BC) acceded to the throne between 1550 and 1515 BC.

Finally, five possibilities exist for an eclipse at sunset mentioned in Ugaritic tablets, and the only candidate from 1450 BC to 1000 BC that can correspond is that of the 9 May 1012 BC. Cross-dating from historical records confirms a date of 1362 BC for the end of Babylon I (conventionally 1595 BC). If 1012 BC reasonably dates Nikmed II, then Akhenaten is dated similarly, and the date of the Hittite king, Murshili (conventionally ?-1590 BC), is 984 BC, matching the solar eclipse of 30 April of that year. Perhaps the Murshilis of Hatti have been confused or have not been properly distinguished, like the Shoshenqs of Egypt, and the Jeroboams of Israel.

## Frank Yurco

Biblicist, Frank Yurco, calls those he disagrees with “minimalists,” “nihilists” and even “charlatans!” Yurco thinks everything in the biblical, historical and archaeological gardens is lovely. He still thinks that the Sothic system of dating is valid, that mice erupt spontaneously from dirty linen and that demons are responsible for disease. The Mesha Stone, the Merneptah Stela and the Shoshenq I campaign relief all confirm everything the bible tells us.

- ❑ The best extant evidence for the existence of Israel, and David and Solomon’s kingdom comes from their foes in antiquity.
- ❑ Merneptah first mentions Israel in his Canaanite campaign of about 1207 BC. Israel existed.
- ❑ Pharaoh Sheshonq of Dynasty 22 campaigned against Judea and Israel and this is cited in the Bible—Shishak (Sheshonq) came up against Rehoboam, son of Solomon, in his fifth regnal year. Sheshonq took enough plunder from his campaign that he could afford to reopen the sandstone quarries and to add a

whole court onto the Karnak complex of temples. Rehoboam had inherited a wealthy kingdom. Rehoboam is Solomon's son, so how can Solomon be a late invention?

- ❑ André Lemaire published in BAR (May/June 1994) a Moabite inscription that mentions the House of David.

Yurco concludes that Israel existed in the late 13th century BC, by Dynasty 22 Judea and Israel had emerged as powerful and wealthy states that appealed to Sheshonq I for plunder, and the Moabites, Israel's staunch foes, acknowledged the House of David existed. "Why do the minimalists persist in their single-minded myopia?"

Yurco thinks the Merneptah Stele proves that Israel "already existed back in the late 13th century BC." Yurco illustrates that biblicists cannot get the bible out of their heads. It is like a supporter of Hunslet Football club finding an ancient reference to Hunslet and concluding that the football team existed in antiquity. The place where the football team was founded existed but not the team. Merneptah's inscription shows Israel was a name that Merneptah knew. The questions are what was the entity called Israel, and when did Merneptah live—in the 13th century BC or as late as the 9th century BC? In the first case, the Israelites were just moving into Canaan, or so the bible says. In the second case, Israel was a statelet in Canaan confirmed by Assyrian archives, though they called it the House of Omri, not Israel!

Yurco studied the Ashkelon Wall at Karnak where there were scenes of 19th Dynasty Egyptians battling supposed Israelites using chariots—when they should have been slaves fleeing from Egypt pursued by the Egyptian chariots, according to *Exodus*. If the Canaanites of prosperous cities like Megiddo were considered as Israelites, then the possibility that the carvings depict thirteenth century Israelites is possible, but then they were not escaping slaves from Egypt! The Israel of Omri in the ninth century might have included these cities in the north either as subjects or as allies, and had chariots, but then the pictures are 400 years later than Yurco thinks. Biblicists can never see the contradictions of their rationalizations.

Yurco also thinks that Pharaoh Shoshenq I of the 22nd Dynasty is the biblical pharaoh, Shishak, plunderer of Solomon's temple in the 5th year of Rehoboam, king of Judah. Yet, the Assyrians vocalized the name Shoshenq as Su-si-in-ku, which gives no basis for the nasal sound being omitted in Semitic language vocalizations of the Egyptian. More important, contrary to Yurco's statement, the places Shoshenq attacked noted on the walls of the temple of Karnak did not include Judah, nor is Jerusalem featured in his list of cities, even though the bible makes it the focus of his attack and claims it bought him off with a vast treasure. Should not Shoshenq have mentioned this particularly lucrative vassalage, especially as it was previously a large empire that he had subdued? Shishak is the ally of Jeroboam of Israel and the enemy of the kingdom of Judah, according to the bible, while Shoshenq, in his monuments, plunders the country known at that time, according to the bible, as Israel, while ignoring Judah as if it did not exist. Biblicists like Yurco cannot see these important distinctions and fool the ordinary Christian with their lies.

Yurco ignores science and logic to imply that Shoshenq was able to carve monuments from the plunder he took from the wealthy kingdom of Judah, his biblical belief. Millennia of Pharaohs that carved monuments never needed any such source previously, yet monuments were carved. Professor Finkelstein has shifted the archaeological material previously associated with Solomon down into the 9th century, one of the most impoverished archaeological periods in Levantine history. Solomon now rules in Iron Age IB when there is no monumental architecture. It is pure fantasy to imagine that Judah could ever have been wealthy before it

became the centre for collecting the taxes of Abarnahara for the Persian kings.

There are no identifiable remains of Western Asiatics at Pi-Ramesse (biblical Raamses) which have come to light, even after a quarter of a century of excavations. There was no destruction of a fortified city of Jericho because it was a ruin at the end of the Bronze Age. Nor is a destruction of Hazor attributable to the time of Joshua's conquest.

Excavations of the Late Bronze Age palace at Hazor is producing a date for the burning of that building around the time of Seti I, some 100 years before the proposed date for any Israelite destruction of the city. No destructions of Canaanite cities can be unequivocally attributed to the Israelites. There was a cultural continuity between the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age. Domestic pottery was continuous between the two periods, with no particular sudden Egyptionizing as would be expected from an influx of people that had lived in Egypt for 400 years. Admittedly population increased and technological advances were made, but all this is better explained by increasing prosperity caused by climatic improvement.

Fundamentalists like Yurco are at a total loss to understand that the bible stories of David and Solomon are mythical and therefore simply wrong when read as history. They persist in accepting biblical "history" and think therefore that the elimination of spurious years still allows Solomon and David to remain. If Rameses II was Shishak, as some revisionists suggest, then the apologists protest Seti I was invading Judah when Solomon was a great emperor. One apologist writes, utterly confused:

What are we to make of these Egyptian operations against rulers in the heart of Israel during the 25th year of Solomon. Why doesn't the Bible record this and why doesn't Seti mention Solomon?

Why doesn't he answer his own questions? Seti I erected a stele in Bethshan lauding his campaign in the Jordan valley, sending one army to Hamath another to Bethshan and a third to Yanoam. These seem like individual city states being disciplined, and not a mighty empire able to fend him off. If Omri was the founder of Israel around 900 BC, all that could have existed before were city states. There never was an Emperor Solomon.

This same apologetic source notes that the principle states to the north and east of the Palestinian hills in David's days were Hamath and Zobah, the same as they were when Sargon the Assyrian king conquered the area in 720 BC, whereas a shortened chronology would make the principle northern states at the time of David Qadesh, Qatna and Tunip, as they were at the time of the El Amarna correspondence. "You don't need to be a genius to see that the New Chronology is flawed," he smugly writes. That the David stories were made up after the later period, drawing upon the situation as the author knew it, quite evades the apologist. He cannot grasp that these stories in the bible are fictional.

This same debunker dates the Egyptian kings from the Assyrian eponyms even though he admits they are flawed before 911 BC. They are only ten years out back to 1450 BC, he tells us. He cannot grasp that the earlier lists of kings and eponyms were written by the later Assyrian administrators to give prestige and continuity to the country and the line of kings, when there is reason to think that for several hundred years Assyria was a divided country with parallel dynasties. Certain that the king lists as well as the bible are God sent, these apologists defend them like terriers.

In the 3000 year long history of Ancient Egypt, 300 years is a minor adjustment. It is only major in the briefer history of Israel—and that is what the biblicists do not like. Even if it were accepted, it would not deter them from their fancies. They would be certain then that the Israelites were the Hyksos and old ideas would be revived once again to save God's reputation as an historian. Rohl reveals himself to be one of these, a latter day Albrightian, declaring from a close study of his bible that the few Egyptian remains found in Jerusalem are the palace of a Bronze Age Solomon's Egyptian wife. He admits quite openly referring to biblicist F Yurco, a critic of new chronologies:

It is ironic that Yurco should describe people like me as “minimalists” when, in fact, what the New Chronology advocates is a maximalist view of biblical history.

He now declares that the plaque nailed to the cross of Jesus has been found. And Rohl calls Kitchen a Christian fundamentalist! Why can't they all find a god that does not need fools and liars to defend him, so that honest people can try to find out what happened in history?

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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 6. Dating

## Physical Evidence

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### Chronometric Techniques

Often the most precise and reliable chronometric dates come from written records. The earliest writing anywhere in the world only goes back about 5000 years. Most of the chronometric dating methods in use today are radiometric. Radioactive isotopes decay at different rates, and these methods depend on these rates of decay or on cumulative changes in materials caused by radioactivity. The measure of a rate of decay is the half-life, the time it takes for half of a radioactive substance to decay by radioactivity. The numbers of atoms remaining unchanged falls by a half in every half-life. The rate of decay is unaffected by changes in the environment of the sample, such as by intense heat, cold, pressure, or moisture.

### Relative and Absolute Dating

Archaeologists collecting artifacts on a given site must use both relative and absolute dating techniques. Absolute dating can find an exact date of how old a specific object is, whereas relative dating simply puts discoveries on the site in an order depending upon stratum and context, without giving a definite date. The law of supposition states that lower layers of earth or artifacts are older than those which lay on top.

Seriation uses the distribution law to distinguish strata from the frequency that an artifact occurs. Objects are slowly introduced into a culture, gradually increase in popularity and then declines in use and disappear. At first they are novel and rare, but as they come into more common use, the number of them found grows. Based upon the frequency of occurrence in the strata, a chart or timeline of usage can be drawn and used later to give estimates of the relative position of strata within the period under consideration. By using seriation and stratigraphy an archaeologist can ascertain the phases an artifact has gone through.

Pottery is extremely valuable in this respect because it is long-lived and characteristic in shape and decoration. The use of ceramics in the construction of chronologies has a long history in archaeological studies, extending back to the works of the late nineteenth century. Using seriation, archaeologists can examine changes in ceramic form over time using only the vessels themselves, largely independent of their context of recovery. Seriation has been defined as the procedure of working out a chronology by arranging local remains of the same cultural tradition in the order that produces the most consistent patterning of their cultural traits.

Pollen grains can be used similarly to date artifacts. Since the pollen grain wall is tough, pollen from 400 million years ago can be found today. Each pollen grain is different in morphology, its structure and shape, and can therefore be identified and studied as its frequency and morphology change over geological time. As the microclimate changes, through weather conditions or human intervention, the balance of vegetation changes, and so the frequency of pollen types. These changes yield up a sequence that can be used in that period and locality to date other finds.

## Radiocarbon Dating

The most commonly used radiometric dating method is radiocarbon dating, carbon-14 or C-14 dating, used to date organic materials such as charcoal, wood, bone and antler, or marine and fresh-water shell, or any tissue that was once alive. The method was developed after World War II by Willard F—Libby.

C-14 is made by the interaction of cosmic rays with nitrogen in the upper atmosphere. The radioactive carbon quickly bonds with atmospheric oxygen to form carbon dioxide, which is absorbed by green growing plants during photosynthesis. Animals eat plants or other animals that have eaten them, and the C-14 soon spreads through all living things. The concentration of C-14 in the atmosphere is fairly constant and while organisms are alive, they contain C-14 in their tissues in the same ratio as in the air because it is constantly being replaced by the process of living. This process obviously ceases at death and the C-14 is no longer replenished, and decays according to its half-life. The ratio of C-14 to the stable carbon-12 depends on how long the organism has been dead, and so measure the time since its death.

It is necessary that:

- ☐ the half-life of radiocarbon is known with sufficient accuracy,
- ☐ the production of radiocarbon by cosmic rays is constant so that the ratio of  $^{14}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$  in the air is constant over time,
- ☐ carbon produced in the air mixes quickly throughout the biosphere,
- ☐ radiocarbon decay is the only factor altering the carbon isotope ratio in the sample,
- ☐ carbon in the carbon cycle has not been changed by other means such as vulcanism or fossil fuel combustion.

The half-life of carbon-14 is  $5730 \pm 40$  years. Modern C-14 has a beta radiation count of about 15 (electrons) per minute per gram of carbon, but C-14 that is 5730 years old has a count of only 15 electrons every two minutes. Such a sample can be deduced to be 5730 years old. Beyond 60,000 years, there is not enough carbon-14 left to measure this way.

Using an accelerator mass spectrometer (AMS) involves actually counting individual carbon-14 atoms, and therefore gives precise answers to the relative amounts of C-12 and C-14, which allows older and smaller samples to be dated, but it is expensive.

Sample contamination by older or younger carbon is the problem, and might be caused by careless technique (unforgiveable), or contamination *in situ*. Furthermore, the assumption of constant generation of C-14 by cosmic radiation is not true and has to be compensated for by plotting calibration curves from samples of known date, often by dendrochronology.

## Dendrochronology

One of the most reliable chronometric dating techniques is based on the fact that annual growth rings on shallow rooted trees vary in width with the amount of water available each season and with temperature fluctuations from winter to summer. Dendrochronology is the study and comparison of tree ring growths, which can provide



very accurate dates about the wood itself or artifacts found in close proximity to it. Clark Wissler of the American Museum of Natural History first recognized the potential for using tree rings as a dating method, and worked with A E Douglass on Pueblo Bonito, a pre-historic Native American settlement in New Mexico.

Each spring or summer a new layer of xylem is formed, producing the rings we can count. In the early growing season thin walled cells are laid down. Thicker walled cells, the latewood, are produced later in the growing season. Simply counting the rings gives a measure of age of the wood, but also all trees of the same species in an area usually have roughly the same pattern of growth. Since weather patterns tend to run in cycles of a number of years, the sequence of tree-rings in a region will also reflect the conditions for growth in each season. Factors affecting tree ring growth are:

1. Slope Gradient
2. Soil properties
3. Temperature
4. Wind
5. Sun
6. Snow Accumulation

When the climate is particularly moist it will produce wider rings and in the dry years, narrow rings. The changing patterns thus formed can be matched from tree to tree in an area, giving a sequence going back as far as old wood can be found. Due to severe weather, trees may not produce a ring every year. Each region has its own unique master sequence since weather patterns are not the same from one area to another. It gives a natural calendar that is notionally accurate to a single year. Ancient log samples can be compared with the master tree-ring sequence to date them to the year that they were cut down. By looking at a species with a known sequence of growth they can look for matching patterns in the unknown.

Dry weather, water logging or fossilization preserve the wood for hundreds or thousands of years, yielding ancient wood to continue sequences into the past. Tree species are most sensitive to environmental change at the latitudinal and elevational limits of its range. Unfortunately, no tree-ring sequence yet goes back much further than 10,000 years. In the American Southwest bristlecone pine chronologies now extend 8,500 years. Work done in Germany and Northern Ireland has expanded the European oak and pine chronologies to over 11,000 years. Work in the Aegean over the past twenty years has produced about 6,000 years of chronologies over the past 9,500 years. As a result, dendrochronology, is primarily used for comparatively recent sites and for checking the reliability of other chronometric methods.

## **Varve Analysis**

Baron de Geer in 1878 invented varve analysis, counting varves or annually laid down sediments. When a glacier reaches a lake, it drops layers of sediment from its melting fringe. A varve consists of two layers, a thick light colored layer of silt and fine sand which forms in the spring and summer and a thin dark colored layer of clay forming in the fall and winter. Since this process repeats in a seasonal cycle, in good conditions the sediments can be counted like tree rings. It provides detailed chronological information about the composition, displacement, and climate of the place, but seems to happen only in near freezing water, and not in oceans or temperate and tropical lakes.

By making a bore hole in the sediment, a vertical sequence of sediment can be drawn, the older, the deeper. Even in glacial waters the varves are not always clear cut, notably sometimes seeming to double in some years perhaps due to unseasonal cold or hot spells, leading to error. Digital methods using computers and colour and hue gradations have proved to increase accuracy. Pollen analysis, first produced by the Swedish geologist Von Post in about 1916, is another help. Each varve can be examined for pollen grains under a high-powered microscope. From the pollen diagram, the analyst can infer sea level, vegetational, and climatic changes. Statistical analysis is usually needed.

## **Geomagnetic Reversal Time Scale**

Another chronometric method, called variously geomagnetic reversal time scale (GRTS) dating, archaeomagnetic dating, and paleomagnetic dating, is based on changes in the earth's magnetic field.

The field of study concerned with ancient geo-magnetic phenomena and the use of archaeological material in determining past variation in the earth's magnetic field is called archaeomagnetism. The fact of variations in direction and intensity of the earth's magnetic field have been recorded in London, Paris and Rome over the past four centuries, and are the basis of archaeomagnetic dating. This variation leaves marks in natural material and is called fossil magnetism.

Declination, inclination and intensity of the earth's magnetic field at any point on the earth's surface shifts. At present the declination for London changes by approximately 1 degree every decade. The angle of dip is also subject to shifting. So the time of acquisition of a particular magnetic character can be traced by comparing the determined magnetic character with records of the past magnetic field direction where the specimen was found. Because observatory studies of the geomagnetic field only extend back for 400 years at the most, only relatively recent material can be dated by direct comparison. So for older specimens, archaeomagnetic dates are determined by finding a rate of the geomagnetic field by comparing the pole location of an archaeomagnetic sample with a master curve of a polar movement constructed from an average of many independently dated samples.

Magnetism occurs in different forms, the most frequent of which are not considered magnetic by most people because they are used to the strong magnetism of substances like iron. In substances with the lesser forms of magnetism, the very weak magnetic fields of individual particles are randomly oriented, but heating to above 600° C causes them to align their fields with any magnetic field present at the time. The magnetic field present everywhere is the earth's own. After cooling, magnetism will remain trapped as a permanent record of the direction of magnetic north at that time until the material is reheated or broken up.

Such a condition can occur in a pottery kiln, a bonfire, or a burning house. Likewise, it can occur in molten rock from a volcano. Baked clay, used for thousands of years in the construction of hearths, ovens and kilns, has had the random orientation of its magnetic domains in its pre-heated state oriented by the earth's field each time it is strongly heated. Cooling traps the aligned domains and gives the clay a slight magnetism. The slight magnetization thus caused can be measured to determine the magnetic intensity and declination at the time of its last cooling.

Datable materials include volcanic rock, fired clay pots, and other forms of clay or rock that have been exposed to high temperatures. Before the sample is taken it must be marked with its exact orientation to geographic or magnetic north, and so items that might have been moved after its last firing are no good. Fixtures such as the floor or wall base of a kiln or oven are ideal. Its thermoremanent magnetism is measured with a magnetometer. The direction of magnetic north slowly wanders about the earth. Thermoremanent magnetism records these movements. By comparing these data, a researcher can determine the direction of magnetic north at the last time the sample had been exposed to a high temperature.

Researchers have created a map of the locations of magnetic north during the last 10,000 years. This was based primarily on charcoal from fire hearths associated with thermoremanent magnetic samples. With this map, it is now possible to determine the age of new samples that date to within this time range. Archaeomagnetism yields good results up to ages of 10,000 years.

At times the north and south magnetic poles reverse. There have been eight reversals in the last 2.43 million years, at 0.69, 0.89, 0.95, 1.9, 2.0, 2.1, and 2.43 million years ago. Lava and volcanic ash deposits often contain the thermoremanent magnetic records of these reversals. When the fossils of early humans or their ancestors are found in association with such deposits, they can be roughly dated by them. However, this dating method is less useful than some others since at best it only tells us that a fossil dates to sometime between two reversals. Paleoanthropologists have found magnetic pole reversals to be useful for dating geological deposits in association with even earlier pre-human fossils going back 10,000,000 years.

## **Potassium-Argon Dating**

The Potassium-Argon (K-Ar) dating method is the measurement of the accumulation of argon in a mineral. Potassium-40 decays into argon-40 and calcium-40 at a known rate. The half-life of potassium-40 is approximately 1.25 billion years. Measurement of the amount of argon-40 in a sample is the basis for age determination.

Argon is an inert gas, and being unreactive remains trapped in the crystal. The time elapsed is like that of thermoluminescence, the time since the sample was treated in some way that reset the K-Ar clock by releasing any argon previously accumulated. Heating is a common way of zeroing the clock. Archaeologists can find how long ago a heat-treated arrow head was made, or a cooking pot was last used.

For more ancient samples, when a fossil is sandwiched between volcanic rock or ash deposits with comparatively large amounts of potassium, their potassium-argon dates provide a minimum and maximum age. Potassium-argon dates have errors of about 15% of the date, and is useful only where rock is rich in potassium, mostly related to volcanic activity. Paleoanthropologists use it mostly to date sites in the 1-5 million year old range. Finding the ratios of argon-40 to argon-39 in volcanic rock gives more accurate dates and requires smaller samples.

## **Thermoluminescence Dating**

Thermoluminescence (TL) dating is used to date rocks, minerals and pottery between the years 300-10,000 BP. All natural minerals are thermoluminescent. Trace amounts of radioactive atoms, such as uranium and thorium,

in soil and clay produce constant low amounts of background ionizing radiation. Energy absorbed from ionizing radiation frees electrons to move through the crystal lattice and some are trapped at imperfections. These energy charged electrons progressively accumulate over time. Heating releases the trapped electrons, producing light.

When a sample is heated to high temperatures in a laboratory, the trapped electrons are released and give off their stored energy in the form of photons of light, which can be measured by photomultiplier tubes and optical wavelength filters. A microcomputer controls the heating and collects the data. In practice, emitted light intensity is measured as a function of the temperature of the sample, typically up to 500 C. A similar effect can be brought about by stimulating the sample with infrared light. The intensity of thermoluminescence is directly related to the amount of accumulated changes produced by background radiation, which depends on the age of the sample and the amount of trace radioactive elements it contains.

In archaeology, thermoluminescence is best for ceramics, cooking hearths, accidentally fire-cracked rocks and deliberately fire treated rocks such as flint or chert. What is measured is the amount of time since the sample was last heated to 350 C, meaning, for pottery, when it was fired, or, for the clay or rock lining of a hearth or oven, the last time a fire burned there. The last time a crystal was reheated and its electrons were released is known as a clock resetting event. The effective time range for TL dating is now about 300,000 years down to a few decades. The accuracy of TL dating is lower than most other radiometric techniques, and it is not yet accurate enough for archaeological dating of pottery. It is only about 15% accurate for a single sample and 7 to 10% accurate for a suite of samples in a single context. The steps are:

- ☐ Measure the sample's intensity of luminescence
- ☐ Repeat this after irradiating the sample with a known dose of radioactivity to relate the luminescence intensity to the radiation dose
- ☐ Determine the dose per year that the sample has been exposed to

## **Electron Spin Resonance Dating**

Electron spin resonance (ESR) dating is based, like TL, on the fact that background radiation causes electrons to separate from their atoms and become trapped in the crystalline lattice of the material. When odd numbers of electrons are separated, there is a measurable change in the magnetic field of the material. Since this magnetic field progressively changes with time in a predictable way, it provides another atomic clock, or calendar, that can be used for dating purposes. Unlike thermoluminescence dating, however, the sample is not destroyed with the ESR method. Electron spin resonance is used to date minerals, especially calcium carbonate in limestone, coral, fossil teeth, mollusks, and egg shells. ESR has been used to provide dates going back roughly ½ billion years.

## **Fission Track Dating**

Fission track dating is based on the fact that some crystalline or glass-like minerals, such as obsidian and mica, contain trace amounts of uranium-238, which is an unstable isotope. When atoms of uranium-238 fission and become lead-206, there is a release of energy-charged alpha particles which burn narrow fission tracks, or damage trails, through the glassy material. These can be seen and counted with an optical microscope.

The number of fission tracks is directly proportional to the amount of time since the glassy material cooled from a molten state. Since the half-life of uranium-238 is known to be approximately 4.51 billion years, the chronometric age of a sample can be calculated. This dating method can be used with samples that are as young as a few decades to as old as the earth and beyond. However, paleoanthropologists rarely use it to date sites more than several million years old.

With the exception of early historic human made glass artifacts, the fission track method is usually only employed to date geological strata. Obsidian and mica artifacts are not fission track dated because it would only tell us when the rocks cooled, not when they were made into artifacts by our early human ancestors.

Three methods are used for dates down to about 10,000 BC—dendrochronology, radiocarbon (C-14), and archaeomagnetic dates based on the wandering of magnetic north around the rotational north pole. Dating events down to 70,000 BP is done with radiocarbon dating, amino acid racemization, thermoluminescence, electron spin resonance and fission track dating. Before that potassium-argon and fission track have usually been used.

### **Uranium-Thorium Dating**

Uranium-Thorium dating is an absolute dating technique which uses the properties of the radio-active half-life of Uranium-238 and Thorium-230. The half-life of uranium-238 is 4,470 million years. The half-life of thorium-230 is only 75,380 years. When the amounts of uranium and thorium are compared an accurate estimation of the age of an object can be obtained.

The methods used are Isotope Dilution Mass Spectrometry (IDMS), Secondary Ion Mass Spectrometry (SIMS) and IDMS-Thermal Ionization Mass Spectrometry (TIMS). The technique has been checked with C-14 dating and is accurate.

Uranium-Thorium dating was first used on fossil bones in 1956, however, it had been used for dating wood before this. This dating technique has been used effectively on marine sediment, bone, wood, coral, stone and soil. One of the benefits of uranium-thorium dating is that the sample sizes can be less than 20 grams, in fact bone samples can be 3-5 grams for an accurate date.

### **Fluorine Dating**

Fluorine is an element that is found in most ground water around the world, and can be used for relative dating. Skeletal remains buried in the earth can occur when percolating ground water inundates the bone remains with a solution of minerals drawn from local soils. A change in the mineral composition of the bone in which hydroxyl ions are substituted by fluoride ions, making insoluble fluorapatite. The degree of the change is a measure of elapsed time.

Fluorine dating is chiefly shows whether bone implements or human skeletal remains found in association with other bones were buried at the same time. Fluorine dating exposed the Piltdown hoax.

## **Obsidian Hydration Analysis**

Developed in 1960, Obsidian Hydration Analysis (OHA) is an inexpensive technique for dating. Obsidian is a natural glass, usually black in color, an igneous rock formed when volcanic magma cools quickly, and found in lava flows. Being glassy, it has little to no crystalline structure, and fractures conchoidally leaving sharp edged sherds. Obsidian was a common rock used in stone tool making, a favorite material like flint for knapping since the beginning of stone tool production, and is found at archaeological sites around the world. Hydration of the newly fractured surface at a steady rate offers an easy method of dating the fracture.

When obsidian is newly exposed to the atmosphere, its surface begins to absorb water from the air. Irving Friedman and R L Smith in 1960 discovered the hydration rate of obsidian depended on the composition of the obsidian, temperature, and relative humidity. Erosion and burning could also reduce the thickness of the hydration layer. Soil type, climate and geochemistry were also relevant.

The hydrated layer at the surface, known as the rind, is visible under a microscope and its thickness can be measured using polarized light, white light, or both according to the flake's translucency. Several measurements on each rind are taken, and the samples are often checked after a week.

## **Amino Acid Racemization Dating**

A newer chronometric method, known as amino acid racemization dating, relies on the fact that amino acids, the building blocks of all proteins, exist in two mirror image forms, both of which otherwise have the same chemical structures. The L-amino acid molecule form has an extension to the left, while the D-amino acid form has an extension to the right. The L-amino acids occur exclusively in life but change to D-amino acids steadily—they racemize—following death. As a result, remains of organisms that died long ago will have more D-amino acids than ones that died recently. Aspartic acid, one of the 20 amino acids, is usually extracted from fossil bones or shells for this dating technique.

Dates as old as 200,000 years have been obtained. Racemization rates can vary with different soil temperatures and possibly other environmental factors, and since these have not yet been fully explored paleoanthropologists consider this dating technique not yet fully reliable, and useful mainly as a relative method.



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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 7. Persians and Greeks

## Persians & Greeks: Zoroastrian Influence on Greek Philosophy

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What was was ever, and ever shall be, it has no beginning or end, but is without limit.

*Melissus of Samos (440 BC)*

### Preface

Zoroaster is said to have travelled to Anatolia, the Asian peninsula south of the Black sea that is now Turkey, but in the seventh century BC was Ionian Greek in the West, Lydian in the centre and bordered Assyria in the east, with Persia beyond. If this is more than mere legend, it offers the possibility of a direct Zoroastrian influence on the Greek philosophy of the Ionians, like Pythagoras of Samos and Thales of Miletus. In dealing with pre-Socratic thought, A N Marlow tells us we find ourselves in an atmosphere more akin to that of the Orient than to that of the West. An indirect influence seems certain.

Pythagoras was said to have learnt from the Magi of Babylon, and the Neo-Pythagoreans' doctrines of immortality and dualism owed much to Magian belief. Plato mentions Zoroaster in *Alcibiades*, describing him as a son of Oromazdes—the God Ormuzd. Since Persian tradition says Zoroaster travelled both to India and China, an influence of Persian religion on Buddhism and Chinese philosophies is also likely. These suggestions are not to disparage the marvellous inventiveness of the Greeks, the Indians or the Chinese, but the remarkable blossoming of religious and philosophical sentiment from the sixth century BC might have had a common seed, and that seed might have been Persia, in the center of all these astonishing changes, and the base of Zoroaster, who preceded the other great men of the time.

A complication is that the earliest Greek myths seem to have been similar to those of the Hindus as well as some of the Persian myths. How did Indian influence reach Greece so early? All of these peoples were Indo-European, and so the Hindu pantheon has affinities with that of the early Greeks, since both are derived from a common source. So it is often difficult to decide where the true points of contact are, but at this date contact with Persians rather than the Indians seems more likely. Radhakrishnan writes that agreements between the myths of the Greeks and the Indians indicate that:

The two peoples must have been in contact at some early period, but neither possessed any recollection of those times and they met as strangers within the Persian Empire.

The emergence of the Persians must have stimulated interest in Anatolia in northern legends. The Ionian Greeks were stimulated by Persian cosmology to think on a cosmic scale and a timeless scale. They began to see morals and nature as the strife between opposites, and the qualities of air, earth, fire and water began to be seen as “elements,” though the term itself is a later invention. As F H Smith pointed out, the *apeiron* (the Boundless) of Anaximander is, in Hindu, the Nameless and Formless, called Aditi, the *Unlimited*, in the Rig Veda. Moreover, this Aditi is ordered by the immanent Rita (Law, Order), later called *Dharma*, the Persian Arta or Asha (Truth), just as in Anaximander an immanent *Dike*, Justice, ensures that all things eventually return to

the *apeiron* whence they came:

From which all things take their rise, and by necessity they are destroyed into these, for all things render just atonement to one another for their injustice according to the due ordering of time.

After the time of Alexander, the way lay so open to Oriental influence and parallels with India become more frequent and less remarkable.

Philosophy is peculiarly Greek, but the lines of thought of many early Greek philosophers seem to emerge from the new cosmology of Zoroaster. Zoroaster's remarkable new ideas stimulated the philosophic mind of men who sought to do better than their enemies. The investigator has to remember, though, that most of the Persian works of Zoroaster's school have been destroyed, so many connexions are irrecoverable, and the apparently clear links between Hindu thought and the pre-Socratic Greeks might simply be reflecting the lost common ground in Persian thought.

Westerners have never been happy even to consider that the glory of Greece owed anything to anybody, let alone Persians who are thoroughly disliked now that they are run by mad mullahs. But the Persians and the Greeks had the same origins, as did the Indians, and in 500 BC probably did not seem much different from each other, though subsequent breeding with the indigenous stock doubtless led to differences in appearance and outlook. So, any debt of Greeks, Chinese or Indians to the Persians has not been adequately explored, simply for reasons of prejudice.

Certainly, something happened, and the most evident thing that did was the emergence of the Persians from obscurity. Some scholars such as M West, (*Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*, Oxford, 1971) have had something to say about the Greek debt to Persia but most ignore it. It was accompanied by a birth of knowledge throughout the world as it was then known. For anyone that might want to begin the study, here is a little background history for comparison with Zoroastrianism.

M L West seems irritated by the no-marks who can never allow any non-Greek or non-Jewish influence on our civilisation, but truthfully both Greeks and Jews were themselves profoundly influenced by Zoroastrianism. So, first introductory essays on the Logos of Philo and Time that will establish some of the themes.

## **The Logos of Philo**

Asha (Arta) and Vohu Manah of the *Avesta* are in some ways like the Logos of Philo, so, in Victorian times, some scholars thought the *Gathas* had been influenced by Philo. The idea of the Logos "arose from the observed regularity of natural phenomena, the rising, course decline and disappearance of the sun and other heavenly bodies, the succession of the seasons, etc," according to Rev L H Mills. Religious services had to copy the regularity of the heavens and seasons—in their rhythm—lest the gods be offended. Herodotus and his successors, Hermippus and Theopompus, report a stage of Mazda worship more fixed and liturgized than such lore as even we find in parts of the later *Avesta*, suggesting its antiquity even then.

Asha—Truth or Order—might be regarded as the rhythm of Nature and so is quite like the Logos of Philo, a creative aspect of God. Vohu Manah is Good Thought, which might be more loosely translated as Benevolence

or Grace. Asha and Vohu Manah in some ways represent the same ideas but as applied universally (Asha) and individually (Vohu Manah). In this sense, Asha has the meaning, socially or communally, of “Justice” while Vohu Manah means personal “Love”—or rather “Kindness,” because it is not sexual.

The basis of the accusation of dependence of the *Gathas* on Philo is that some parts of the *Avesta*, and works like the *Denkart* were late enough to have had Platonic influences, but others such as the *Gathas* are plainly earlier than Plato, from language and from the poetic form, and could not have had any such influence, even interpolated. Greek philosophy was taken into Persia only in 533 AD by Simplicius and his school. The *Denkart* was written in the Moslem period. Rev L H Mills proved any dependence of the *Gathas* on Philo was absurd and chronologically unsound, so that any influence that existed was the other way round. So, indeed most scholars have found.

The Egyptians too had a divine order, according to Frankfort. Maat is...

...a divine order, established at the time of creation. It is manifest in nature in the normalcy of phenomena, it is manifest in society as justice, and it is manifest in an individual's life as truth.

Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation*

The Egyptian texts say the king's throne was “founded on Maat”, and each coronation was a renewal of the cosmos, a victory of order over chaos. Through his edicts as ruler, and by enforcing justice and piety among the people, the king kept Egypt conforming with cosmic order and helped maintain it. Yet Egypt, in its formative period, was greatly influenced by the parallel civilization in Asia by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Scarab seals were based on cylinder seals from Ur. The fantastic menagerie of strange animals came from Sumeria but were modified to suit the imagination of Egyptians. Foreign ideas came into Egypt but were Egyptianized, and the process was completed in respect of Sumerian influence by the end of the Egyptian first dynasty. Maat and the annual celebration of God's victory over chaos seem to have been taken into Egypt from Asia, perhaps by early Iranian invaders.

Heraclitus might have introduced the concept of the Logos, derived from the Persian idea of “Asha” or cosmic order, and Parmenides spoke of trusting only the Logos or “Reason,” as opposed to the senses or imagination. The idea of “Reason” as inherent in Nature was dear to Heraclitus. For Heraclitus, “Fire,” also “Asha,” was the eternal substance, a remarkable guess, we might think today, knowing that energy is, and that fire is the most obvious of its forms. He was also inspired in seeing movement as being constant—the process of “becoming”. He did not consider the Logos as active or conscious. His Logos is the eternal law of motion, eternally splitting apart and pulling together. By strife alone, life becomes possible—disease makes health valued, there is no peace without war. All of it is plainly traceable to Zoroastrianism. Stories of the two antagonistic divinities of the Persian religion must have stimulated Heraclitus's thought of a world moved by conflict. In Zoroastrianism, conflict is utterly at the centre of life—time and movement only begin with the Evil Creation. Before that perfection meant *stasis*.

Which Holy Spirit was inspiring these guesses? It could only have been Spenta Mainyu, the Zoroastrian one, if it necessary to have one at all, as Christians insist.

Heraclitus must have been somewhat aware of the nature of the widespread Mazda worship with which

his successors were so familiar, for the Persian forces which looked to Ahuramazda for victory and abhorred Angra Mainyu [or the Druj] as the author of defeat, surged for years up to the very gates of Ephesus where Heraclitus was in his prime.

Rev L H Mills

He will have seen the fire altars of the Persian army burning in their camps by night and discovered that it was Asha, apparently the same as the regulating principle of nature. Asha as fire and Asha as Truth are hardly connected in the Avesta but, who are we to assume that they also were not for Heraclitus. He heard the same word for both and perhaps saw them as a noun and a verb, inspiring his thoughts.

Petty critics, unable to bear the idea that western thought, as well as religion, might have started in the east, do just what Christians always do to defend Christianity against external influences—they highlight the differences, as though Heraclitus had to take the entire Zoroastrian belief system or none at all. Had he done the former he would have been a Zoroastrian, and had he done the latter he would never have been heard of at all! Needless to say there is little left of whatever Heraclitus believed. If we had had more, his sources might have been clearer, but as it is he used manifestly Zoroastrian concepts, but used them in his own way, either because he did not understand the originals properly or because he rejected parts of the Zoroastrian philosophy. Since he was utterly opposed to gods of any kind, other than using the name for certain natural powers, he tried to put the Zoroastrian idea of conflict into a non-supernatural framework.

Antithesis is the keynote of Zarathustrianism.

Rev L H Mills

Moving on in Greek philosophy, Empedocles appears, also with a dualistic system, influenced by Heraclitus or perhaps by Zoroastrianism directly. The causes of motion were the two principles of “Love” and “Hate,” Love being the uniting principle and Hate the dividing one.

Anaxagoras introduces the idea of “Endless Time” from Zoroastrianism where it was called “Zruvani Akarani.” For him, “Nous” stirred matter into motion, “Nous” being another name for Logos. Plato came early under the influence of Heraclitus through his pupil, Cratylus. Plato took to this Nous and had one that was transcendental and therefore a god, and one that was in nature as a World Soul. Nous was Reason and conflicted with Necessity (Matter) in yet another form of dualism. Nous, Logos and Logisticon were all the same thing, a sort of universal Reason.

The Stoics, like Heraclitus, believed in no conscious, finger poking, personal gods, because they took Order or the Logos as being god—the law of all things in the universe. It was a law, so could not whimsically stir its index finger in the proper order of the world, like the Jewish and Christian god. It was a law of the universe not a transcendental being looking into the world.

Aristobulus introduced Logos into Judaism as the creative word of God about 160 BC. In the form of the Goddess Sophia it appears in the *Wisdom of Solomon* (7:22) as omniscient, omnipotent, controller of the best of things, continually reviewing them and directing the fate of humanity, especially that of the pious. Yet God remains the creator, though Sophia seems to have taken most other of his characteristics.

Philo finds that Plato, “the holiest and the great,” Heraclitus, “the great and the famed,” Parmenides, Empedocles and Zeno, a “holy union of divine men,” are all indebted to Moses. That seems quite absurd until one realises that [Moses is Mazas](#)—Ahura Mazda—and suddenly Philo might be taking sense. The question is whether Philo knew of the identity.

God is the “Being One” or simply the “Being.” Philo saw God as the “Mover” without which everything would be static, like Heraclitus’s Logos. Perhaps in the same way the Stoics saw the Logos as god, but as the universal law, and could honestly declare, though they were atheists in fact: “The world is full of god.” So, for Philo, God is the “Mind of All Things”.

He also calls the Logos “Father.” In the Avesta only Ahuramazda is ever called Father, but the Holy Spirit was Ahuramazda in activity and Logos had this function for the Hellenistic Jews. Philo has other Logoi besides the Logos. They seem to tie in with Platonic Ideas as Forces, but could also reflect the Amesha Spentas, or the Angels. Forces put the disordered into order and define the limit of things. Philo seems to identify the seven Cities of Refuge (Num 35) with the Amesha Spentas, though one has dropped out through a textual corruption, and he also sees the Logos as a charioteer as does the Avesta of Asha. These sound like sun analogies.

So, the evolution of the Logos starting in Ionia influenced by Zoroastrian belief was, in summary:

- ☐ first, a monistic, static, and non-religious power,
- ☐ growing dynamic in Heraclitus, whose “Fire” then passed into the Stoic system as Logos,
- ☐ crossing to Attica after the Persian wars,
- ☐ profoundly developed by Plato and Aristotle,
- ☐ adopted in an impersonal form by the Stoics, influenced by Egypt,
- ☐ these converging currents synthesized in Plutarch,
- ☐ and in Philo who strove to see in Plutarch’s sources the doctrines of Moses.

The Logos, originally a blind, impersonal, immanent force in the world, became transformed by Pagan myth, and by the syncretism of Philo of Alexandria until it was personified when John moulded it to his dogma, and asserted that the “Word” was made flesh and was Jesus Christ, thereby, in the words of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, cutting short “all perilous speculation among Christians.”

Instead, the Logos, having appeared in John’s gospel, became so important for Christians that they began to redefine history:

Those who live according to or with the Logos are Christians, even if they were thought atheists, and such were Socrates, Heraclitus and the like among the Greeks.

Justin Martyr *Apologies*

## Time

Pherecydes of Syros who is said to have come to Ionia from further south east in southern Anatolia flourished about 544 BC. Though he is not well known, he is the first to speak of metempsychosis (reincarnation) and he is the first philosopher to have identified a primeval god of time. He acknowledged no teacher but says he worked

from the *Revelation of Ham* and from the *Secret Works of the Phoenicians*. He identified a trinity of gods, Chronos (Time, not Cronos), Zas and Cthonie. Zas is the high god (Zeus?) and Cthonie is "She who is beneath the Earth." Zas gave Cthonie the earth as a cloak of honour, and then married her. So she was Ge (Gaia). Chronos did not marry but somehow produced the remaining three elements of fire, air and water.

Curiously, Chronos had fought another primeval god called Ophioneus (the "Snaky One") for control of the heavens. Chronos had won and cast Ophioneus into the sea and assumed the victor's crown. The serpent god was apparently utterly defeated and was not a lingering force of evil. This part of the story sounds Babylonian, like Tiamat and Marduk.

The concept of an eternal Chronos, says M L West (*Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*), is "without precedent in Greek accounts of the origin of things." Ra, in the Book of the Dead is the first primeval god and the ruler of years. A Phoenician inscription of the ninth or eighth century has Shamash as the "Sun of Eternity." Time was at first an aspect of the sun, gradually seen in the abstract as even more basic or primeval. The winged disc was popular in Phoenician cultic art and the Phoenicians were strongly influenced by Egypt. Possibly the idea of Chronos went from Egypt to Ionia via the Phoenicians.

Praja-Puti, the Creator in the *Rig-Veda*, appears as a "golden embryo" but later, in the *Athervaveda*, he is the son of "Time" (Kala). This evolution suggests that the concept of "Time" was not original in Indian cosmology. The best evidence is that the concept of time was Phoenician of about the seventh century whence it spread east and west, entering India from Persia. S G F Brandon says the Iranian word Zurvan (Time) is known from the 12th century BC but not in any mythological context. The point of all this is that it implies that Zurvan as a sexless and eternal primeval god was a late heresy of the original Zoroastrian idea.

Later Zoroastrians, the Zurvanites, faced with two apparently equal gods, one good and one bad, invented the concept of "Zurvan" or Endless Time out of which came the conflicting principles. It is a sophisticated idea and there is no way of knowing that the concept did not exist before Zoroaster and have some role in his scheme, but it is not mentioned in the *Gathas*. Another sect, the Gayomartians, attributed the Evil One to a bad thought in the mind of the Good Spirit. For Zoroaster, however, the only creator was Ahuramazda.

Details of the belief in Zurvan are all late, but evidence exists that it existed from about the time of Artaxerxes II. Zurvan simply means "time" and time is a key part of Zoroastrianism, which divides it into the time of creation, the finite time of history ("Time of Long Dominion") and the eternal time after that ("Boundless Time"). At the end of finite time, Ahuramazda destroys the evil creation, and restores the world to its pristine state before the Evil Spirit realised what was happening—the kingdom of God.

The sources on Zurvanism are all Sasanian or later. The myth that developed is this. Zurvan existed eternally, but wanted a son. He sacrificed to get one for 1000 years with no result and began to doubt he would succeed. Out of that doubt was born the Evil Spirit, but his worthy sacrifices had in fact worked and yielded the Good Spirit. Zurvan gave the rule of the world to the first son to appear and it turned out to be the Evil Spirit. Realising his error he gave the Baresman twigs to Ahuramazda and placed him over Angra Mainyu for "the time of long dominion," when Ahuramazda would have absolute control. Knowing this with his foresight, Ahuramazda began his Good Creation, and when he saw it Angra Mainyu countered it step by step with his Evil Creation.



The idea of a Great Year arose about 500 BC, at about the same time as the 360 degree circle of heaven. The Chaldaeans realised that the planets, considered gods, moved in cycles and, because they influenced human life, so human history must be cyclical. The time it took for all the known planets to return to their initial positions was the Great Year. It encompassed the Flood (a Babylonian legend) and the purging by fire (a Persian concept). The observations of the astronomers were not accurate enough to allow a precise calculation of the Great Year so different assumptions led to different answers.

The Zoroastrian concept of time was linear not cyclical, but the Zurvanites fitted the cycles into the “time of long dominion.” Plutarch in *Isis and Osiris* explains the theory of each spirit ruling alternately, the cosmic warfare then the final peace in perfection. Plutarch’s source was Theopompos from the fourth century BC, which confirms that the theory had been worked out in the time of Artaxerxes II. The Greek idea that Zoroaster had lived 6000 years before was probably from the originally conceived length of the time of long dominion, but it was extended by having 3000 years for creation to happen, and another 3000 years for three Saoshyants to appear each millennium as limited time approached its end. The last incarnation of Zoroaster took the world into “Boundless Time” and eternal bliss for the righteous. Interestingly, the titles or duties of the three Saoshyants can be rendered as the “Teacher of Righteousness” and the “Teacher of Reverence,” with the last one being the “Righteous One.” Each of these millennia copied the whole of history in that they began on a high then degraded until they were lifted again by a new Saoshyant.

## **The Growth of Greek Society**

Between the years 1000 and 800 BC, when the Persians were migrating south of the Caucasus toward their ultimate destination on the Iranian plateau, Greeks settled the mainland and the coast of Asia Minor, and grew in number. By 750, growth in population and trade led to villages amalgamating into city-states. By the 700s, when Jerusalem was yet still a poor and insignificant town in the Judaeian hills, the Greek city-states were thriving along the coast of Asia Minor, at Smyrna, Ephesus and Miletus. On the Peloponnesian peninsula in southern Greece were the city-states of Argos, Olympia, Corinth and Sparta, and on the peninsula of Attica was Athens.

Greek merchants trading between the islands and coastal cities in timber and grain, took to longer coastal voyages to more distant cities, then to the island of Cyprus, and on to northern Syria. Wealthy farmers were growing crops for sale abroad—mainly wine and olive oil. Many landless Greeks were hired to make pottery, furniture and other wares, and some became rich. These activities induced the Greeks to learn writing. First they wrote out bills of trade, then poetry then philosophy.

As Greece lacked tin to make bronze, the forging of iron arose instead, making them early masters in the new technology. The use of iron increased productivity in agriculture and manufacturing. The Greek population soared adding to the incentives for young Greeks to emigrate elsewhere. Greeks established colonies in southern Italy at Cumae, just west of what would in Roman times be Neapolis (Naples), and Croton. On the island of Sicily, they founded colonies at Syracuse and Messina, and they founded colonies on the coast of Libya and at points around the Black Sea.

The women of Greece were property, though an Athenian could have only one wife. Nevertheless, he could have a concubine living within his family—whose children were not recognized as legitimate and not given

citizenship. Wives were valued as the bearers of children with citizenship status. Women had to be virgins at marriage and faithful after marriage. The male was not required to be faithful to his wife, but law demanded that a husband divorce an unfaithful wife and return her dowry.

In Athens, women could own no property except their clothes, jewelry and slaves, and they could enter into only minor market transactions. As members of farming families, women had helped in the fields, but with city-dwelling had come the practice of protecting women from public view and confining them to their homes. In such homes, women had their own quarters, and they dined together in a room apart from the men. A man committed an outrage if, without his having been invited by the master of the house, he entered a house where women might be present.

Women had to be accompanied if they left their house. They were to be under the protection of a guardian at all times—their father or a close male relative if they were unmarried, their husband if they were married, their son or a close male relative if they were widowed. The only women free of these controls were foreign women, those few citizens who were living in dire poverty and forced to labour outside the home, or prostitutes.

### **First Greek Books—Homer and Hesiod**

Sometime before 700 BC Homer, a Greek poet who lived on the coast of Asia Minor, wrote down an epic poem called the *Iliad*, a story about war between the Mycenae Greeks and the city of Troy that had been passed from generation to generation in the oral tradition. In it, Homer described events as governed by the gods, just as the Sumerian scribes, Zoroaster in Persia and those in India who wrote the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* did. The Greeks had ten, then later, twelve Olympian gods. Herodotus accepted the Egyptians' claim to have originated the worship of the twelve-member Olympian pantheon (*Histories* 2:4), and identified Dionysus explicitly with Osiris (*Histories* 2:144, cf 47-49). The Eighteenth Dynasty inscriptions of Hatshepsut and Amenhotep III, indeed, show a pantheon of twelve Egyptian gods—Montu, Atum, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis, Horus, Nephthys, Seth or Anubis, and Hathor (J H Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*).

The Indo-European tribes entered Greece with a supreme god of the sky, the god of thunder and lightning and all other aspects of the weather, Dyaus Pitar. When these Greeks learnt how to write they rendered his name as Zeus and made him chief of the Olympians, the lord of the heavens—for Homer “the father of gods and men”. Zeus, however, was the youngest son of Cronos (Chronos? meaning “Time,” the same as the Persian “Zurvan?”). Hera, his wife, was the protector of women and marriage.

Artemis, Diana of the Romans, the twin sister of Apollo, and goddess of hunting and wildlife, was the moon goddess. Athena, wisdom, born from the head of Zeus in myth, was the goddess adopted by the Athenians, and was a protector of cities.

Poseidon, the sea, was the Neptune of the Romans and caused earthquakes and volcanic eruptions because the ancients believed the earth was supported by water. Aphrodite, the Roman Venus, goddess of love and beauty, was Ishtar of Assyria, and Astarte of Phoenicia. Pluto was Hades, meaning “the unseen,” because it was the underworld, the place of the dead.

Homer described mortals as having a degree of free will, but also doing unintentional deeds, originating in

emotion. Through emotion, rather than reason, men followed the dictates of the gods. Homer described dreams as religious messages, such as those sent by Zeus to the Greek king Agamemnon. And Homer's *Iliad* described religious rituals that included the ceremonial cremation of a warrior's remains, which had to be, therefore, transported home for the ritual.

Another Greek poet who wrote before 700 was Hesiod—also from the coast of Asia Minor. Hesiod believed that the Greeks were descended from a golden race that lived in idle luxury in the distant past, before Zeus was lord, when Zeus's father was king, and Hesiod sought to account for the golden race's demise and successive declines in civilization. This is close indeed to the Persian myth, and might reflect the common origins of these Indo-European peoples or Persian influence—Persians migrating south of the Caucasus at this time might have begun to make a mark on history through their own mythology.

To explain the fall, Hesiod reworked a Caucasian myth about the god Prometheus—a tale admired by the Greeks. Like the Hindu god Agni, Prometheus was a god of fire, a benign god for humans and a god who taught humanity their arts and crafts. Hesiod described Prometheus as stealing fire from the heavens and giving it to mankind. This theft angered Zeus, and he had Prometheus chained to a rock on a mountain in the Caucasus, where an eagle or vulture tore at his liver each day, Zeus causing the liver of Prometheus to grow anew each night in preparation for the next day's torture. The Persians revered fire also, not as a god but as an intermediary between heaven and earth.

To punish mankind for accepting fire stolen from the heavens, Zeus was said to have sent them a curse in the form of woman. Here was the Greek version of the Hebrew legend of man's fall—the creation of women. The woman's name was Pandora, and Zeus sent her with a magic box that he forbade her to open. But after she had been on earth awhile she grew curious and opened the box, and out came the earthly plagues and misfortunes that forever after harmed humankind. Pandora hurriedly put the lid back on the box, but all that remained inside was hope. This legend too is familiar in Persian mythology, though it is Ahriman not Pandora who releases the plagues upon mankind.

Zeus, at a conference with his fellow gods in his heavenly palace, decided to destroy humankind and to provide the earth with a new race of mortals worthier of life and more reverent to them. Fearing that destroying mankind by fire might set heaven itself aflame, Zeus called for assistance from a god of the sea, and humans were instead swept away by a great flood.

A god the Greeks acquired from Syria or the Phoenicians sometime around the time of Homer or Hesiod was Adonis. Greek myth described Adonis as a beautiful youth with whom both the goddesses Aphrodite and Persephone fell in love. Persephone was the daughter of Zeus and a goddess of fertility in competition with Aphrodite. She presided over Hades, the place where the spirits of the dead resided. According to the myth of Adonis, Persephone, wanting Adonis, held him captive in Hades, and Aphrodite, also wanting Adonis, freed him from Hades and Persephone's captivity.

Then, while hunting, Adonis was killed by a wild boar, which sent him back to Hades and Persephone. Aphrodite bitterly mourned his death and pleaded with Zeus to restore Adonis to her. Zeus decided to be impartial between the desires of Persephone and Aphrodite, and he decreed that Adonis would spend his winter months with Persephone—an annual death—and his summer months with Aphrodite—an annual resurrection. These deaths

and resurrections coincided with the seasonal cycles and the growth of crops. Adonis was therefore a fertility god. Every year, Greeks celebrated Adonis's death and resurrection, often with wailing and the beating of one's own breast with one's fists. Adonis is plainly a version of the eastern god, Tammuz, who in the Hebrew scriptures had the women of Jerusalem wailing in sorrow in *Ezekiel*.

Popular history has it that the Greeks of these times had a vision of the world different from the Jewish worshippers of Yehouah. Supposedly, at this time the Israelites (not "Hebrews" who are all the people of Eber-niri, Persian Abarnahara, of whom the Israelites were only a part) saw the universe as guided by divine purpose, and they would hope for divine intervention that would deliver them from their suffering. Those who worshipped the gods of Homer and Hesiod looked for no such intervention.

The trouble is that up until this time the Israelites had not suffered unduly in their land of milk and honey. About 700 BC the Assyrians did come conquering and supposedly carried off ten of the tribes. About 100 years later the Babylonians carried off the leaders of the rest of the Jews. So when Homer and Hesiod were writing their legendary sagas, Jerusalem and the Hebrews had scarcely had any history at all. The Jewish scriptures are later works pretending to be early—pseudepigraphs.

Early Greeks saw the universe as a chaotic conflict of divine wills, and their gods as experiencing the same blessings and misfortunes as humans. They viewed their gods not only as vain in their desire for reverence from humans, an idea picked up by the Jewish writers under the influence of the Greek conquerors, but as generally imperfect and as negligent and playful. The moral "Lord of the Skies" was an invention of other Indo-Europeans, the Persians, and it is Persian influence that made gods moral for both Jews and Greeks.

Greeks saw Zeus as *their* god and concerned primarily with them—attributing to themselves a greater importance than other peoples, ideas that brushed off on to the Jews under the Greek kings. They did not see their father-god as jealous and with chronic concerns about the wrongdoing of his people, but they did see him as a god who became angry, and they respected him and feared his thunderbolts.

One of the important gods among the Greeks was Apollo, another god of foreign origin. The son of Zeus, from the time of Homer, Apollo, was god of light and so identified with Helios (the sun). Apollo was also a god of life, knowledge and laws, a god who made men aware of their guilt, and a god of healing. For some, Apollo was a god of crops and herds. He became established at Delphi and was to be seen as a god of communion, music, poetry and dance.

At Delphi, Apollo was served by an oracle, a woman over fifty, who took hallucinogenic drugs in the form of leaves, which she chewed. People, including statesmen, came as pilgrims to Delphi from various parts of Greece to ask questions of the oracle, questions such as whether they should marry, whether their spouse was unfaithful, whether their city should go to war. The oracle would utter unintelligible messages that a priest would interpret and pass to the pilgrim in the form of riddles rather than answers that were specific and clear, leaving the pilgrim himself the task of interpretation.

## **Early Greek Philosophy**

In Greece, as in India, philosophy was pursued by those who were free from having to labour through each day

at menial tasks. Philosophy was the preoccupation of only a few—mainly aristocrats. Among the Greeks, philosophy began as an investigation of the properties of nature—a move beyond accepting all as basically spirit and magic.

Aristotle calls the early philosophers “Investigators of Nature,” declaring their scientific interests as including physics, mathematics, astronomy and physiology. They did not cease to speak of the gods of Homer, but rejected supernatural explanations based on the mythology as explaining nothing. They sought to show that the world was essentially rational. In this they were vastly superior in intellect to millions of subsequent Christians, Jews and Muslims, though they lived almost 3000 years ago.

The Greeks began to speculate how the world was arranged and functioned. Zeus looked upon a stationary earth. If the earth itself moved, clouds would be left behind, and an arrow shot straight up into the air fell back down to the same place without being deflected as they imagined it would have if the earth meanwhile had moved.

The stars appeared to rotate about a point in the sky above the north pole each night. To keep them in their relative positions, the Greeks reasoned that they were mounted on a rigid rotating spherical shell, centered on the earth. That the heavens were so fixed, strong and regular seemed to impart them with a god-like quality that justified the almighty sky god—Zeus to the Greeks and Jupiter to the Romans.

In the *Iliad*, Zeus boasts he is the strongest of all the gods, for if a golden chain were fastened to the sky, he could hold up all the other gods, sun and moon and earth and sea, so that they would dangle in mid-air, but all of them combined could not drag him down from heaven.

The strength of the sky in the *Iliad* implied it was rigid. The works of Homer were the basis for a Greek education down through the Hellenistic period. The plays, poetry, and philosophy of the Greeks often harked back to Homer. Homer was effectively the bible of the Greeks, though it was never revered quite like the Christian bible, and what he wrote about Zeus was definitive for Greeks. Some thought the sky must be made of stone or iron to be so strong, and meteorites were seen as evidence of this and as divine because they came from the sky. These early Greek philosophers were not from mainland Greece but were either from the other side of the Aegean, Ionia in Anatolia (the East), or from Greek colonies in Italy. The Greek cities in Anatolia were more prosperous and successful than the mainland cities and were subject to greater commerce, in trade and intellectually, with the mighty civilisations to the east.

Philosophy among the Greeks is believed to have begun in the Ionian city of Miletus, the richest and most powerful Greek city on the coast of Asia Minor. Miletus was on the edge of interacting cultures: Greek, Mesopotamian and Egyptian, and was adjacent to the rich kingdom of Lydia. Its people travelled, giving them an awareness of conflicting ideas, which encouraged thinking. And among the aristocrats of Miletus was an independence of thought that was a part of an effort toward individual excellence that had been encouraged as justification for their privileges.

The rulers of Lydia wanted to expand their kingdom to the coast of the Aegean but the Ionian Greek cities stood in their way. So, the Milesians came into conflict with the Lydians. Then towards the end of the seventh century BC, Miletus concluded an alliance that secured her against molestation by Lydia. Even half a century later,

when Croesus conquered Ephesus, Miletus was not made subject to the Lydians.

As early as the fifth century, Croesus was considered the patron of Greek wisdom, and, though scholars like to belittle it, the myth could hardly have developed so early if it was false. The importance of Lydia was that it was rich and successful and was the center of learning at the time. Herodotus says that the “sophists” flocked to the court of Sardis. Lydia was an advanced post of Babylonian culture, and Croesus was on friendly terms with the kings of Egypt and Babylon. Amasis of Egypt had the same Hellenic sympathies as Croesus.

“The common tale among the Greeks” was that Thales accompanied Croesus as a military engineer in his campaigns. The Ionians, noted engineers, were employed by the eastern kings, and Thales supposedly diverted the Halys river for his employer. The Ionian philosophers sought the material principle (*arche*) of things, and the mode of their origin and disappearance.

The spirit of the Ionians in Asia was thoroughly secular and the Milesians wholly ignored traditional beliefs. Their use of the term “god” for the primary substance and the innumerable worlds had no religious significance. In the Aegean islands, centered round the sanctuary of Delos, the home of the Ionians long before the Anatolian coasts were open to colonization, memories of a remote past were retained and what remains of local writer, Pherecydes, of the neighboring island of Syros, read like utterances of an earlier age. No doubt it was also different in the Chalcidian and Ionian colonies of the West, which were founded at a time when Hesiod and his followers still held unchallenged authority.

### **Thales of Miletus (c 624-548 BC)**

The first philosopher from Miletus was Thales, who is thought to have entered manhood around the end of the 600s BC. If orthodox dating of the life of Zoroaster is correct, the two men were almost exact contemporaries, though many scholars, judging from the *Gathas*, put Zoroaster several hundred years earlier. He flourished in Lydia about the time the Medes won the war against Lydia in 585 BC. He had a long life and lived well into the Persian conquest, so he had many decades of contact with Median and Persian magi who probably triggered his speculations and began the fashion for it in Greece.

The fact that Miletus “struck no blow” against Cyrus suggests that the alliance must have been forged through an influential Iranian presence in the town. It smacks of advanced preparation by Cyrus’s agents.

Thales wrote nothing, and no writer earlier than Aristotle knows anything of him as a scientific man and a philosopher, but he was the founder of the Milesian school, and therefore the first man of science. Nearly all of our information about him comes what others wrote centuries later—mainly from Plato, Aristotle and Herodotus. Even before Herodotus wrote, he was considered one of the seven sages, Solon, the founder of Athenian law being another, and the founder of Greek philosophy. Thales, in Herodotus, before the fall of the Lydian monarchy, urged the Ionian Greeks to unite in a federal state with its capital at Teos.

Thales was supposedly of Phoenician descent but might have been a Carian or Cretan and, whatever his ethnicity, he was thoroughly immersed in Ionian culture. The Phoenician link might be because he brought Phoenician navigational techniques into Miletus. The Milesians were great traders by sea and land and therefore interested in navigation. Thales showed how a ship could be steered by observing Ursa Minor. He is also said



to have tried to revise the calendar.

He was a man of wealth, leisure and energy. He apparently went to Egypt and saw there the use of simple and practical geometry in land surveying. Thales had a theory of the inundations of the Nile and is said to have introduced Egyptian geometry into Greece. He was interested in the nature of things and worked this geometry into a set of new mathematical principles.

He was first noted as an inventor and an engineer, and for king Croesus of Lydia he made the river Halys passable by diverting its waters. Thales was also interested in heavenly bodies. A story about Thales says he was once so intent in his observations of the heavens, he fell into a well. In his travels, he might have come into contact with the astronomical data that Babylonians had accumulated across the centuries, but he also made his own observations of the stars.

Herodotus reported that Thales had predicted an eclipse, which put an end to the war between the Lydians and the Medes (28 May, 585 BC?). Oddly his students did not know how to make such predictions, and though Thales learned geometry from the Egyptians it is unlikely that he learnt how to calculate eclipses, especially as solar eclipses occur only in narrow regions on earth, unlike lunar eclipses that are visible everywhere.

Eclipses of the moon can be predicted from time sequences without knowing their true cause, and the Babylonians did so, having discovered a cycle of 223 lunar months, within which eclipses of the sun and moon recurred at equal intervals of time. In the eighth century BC, Babylonian astronomers watched for solar eclipses at predicted dates and declared it a good omen if they did not occur. Thales, following Babylonian practice, suggested there would be an eclipse of the sun—and one was visible in Asia Minor! A bad omen for the Lydians, it turned out.

As an engineer who manipulated material realities he thought the material world was understandable rather than merely secretive magic, and this led him to speculate about its basic nature. The basic nature of matter was the great question of the day, and Thales declared water to be the basis of all things. He saw that water was necessary to life and that it was everywhere. He believed with his contemporaries that the world was flat and, according to Aristotle, floated on a great body of water. He theorized that the world was in essence water and that it had originally been in the form of water—as if without moisture everything would become dust and nothingness.

Zoroaster had said that the “creation” of earth was a great disc upon the “creation” of water. Thales said that water was the material cause of things. The Iranians venerated water even more than fire to judge from Herodotus, water being the first of the six creations. Thales also famously said, according to Aristotle, that “all things are full of gods,” a strange statement unless it is seen in the Zoroastrian context of Amesha Spentas, yazatas, fravashis, elements and other holy attributes that were invariably personified.

Water is familiar to us in a solid, a liquid, and a vaporous form. Evaporation suggests that the heavenly bodies are supported by the moisture they draw from the sea. Water comes down again in rain. Because rivers bring down alluvium, the philosophers thought the rain turned to earth. Lastly, earth turns once more to water, an idea derived from springs. The “waters under the earth” were independent of the rain but due to the reversion of the earth to its natural form.

Like others of his time, Thales was unconcerned with that ingredient of scientific proof called verification, and he believed in gods—all things are full of gods. Aristotle inferred that Thales believed in a “soul of the world.” Aetius, missing the caution of Aristotle, attributed the idea of the world-soul definitely to Thales and identified the world-intellect with God, like the Stoics. Cicero eliminating Stoic pantheism, turned the world-intellect into a Platonic demiourgos, claiming that Thales conceived of a divine mind that made everything from water.

The magnet and amber are alive and have souls, for they have the power to move things without contact. Note that to say the magnet and amber are alive is to imply that other things are not, so Thales had a diluted idea of what a god was, if he also believed that everything had gods and the world had a soul.

## **The Worship of Dionysos**

Pythagoras and Xenophanes, the most striking figures of the generation that saw the Greek cities in Asia become subject to Persia, were both Ionians, but both spent the greater part of their lives in the West. There it was no longer possible to ignore religion, especially when reinforced by the revival that now swept over the Greek world. Henceforth, the leaders of enlightenment must either seek to reform and deepen traditional religion, like Pythagoras, or oppose it openly, like Xenophanes.

The revival was not a mere recrudescence of the old Aegean religion, but was profoundly influenced by the diffusion of certain ideas originating in what was then the far North. The temple legend of Delos is certainly ancient, and it connects the worship of Apollo with the Hyperboreans, who were thought of as living on the banks of the Danube. The “holy things wrapped in straw,” which were passed on from people to people till they reached Delos by way of the head of the Adriatic, Dodona, and the Malian Gulf, bear witness to a real connexion between the Danubian and Aegean civilizations at an early date, and it is natural to associate this with the coming of the Achaeans. The stories of Abaris the Hyperborean and Aristaeus of Proconnesus belong to the same religious movement and prove that it was based on a view of the soul, which was new, in the Aegean.

The connexion of Pythagoras with Delos is well attested, and it is certain that he founded his society in cities which gloried in the Achaean name. Certain things in the life of Pythagoras that are otherwise puzzling can be explained if the Delian religion was really Achaean.

In Thrace, the northern religion had attached itself to the worship of Dionysos, a god of fertility and vegetation, and was associated with the name of Orpheus, believed to have been a priest and poet. The Orphic religion had two features which were new in Greece:

1. a written revelation as the source of religious authority,
2. adherents organized in communities based on voluntary initiation rather than blood ties.

Some Greeks sought relief from the rebellious upheavals of the 600s BC in this Thracian religious cult that promoted everlasting life and community. The new aspects appealed to all those who could not find satisfaction in the worship of the anthropomorphic gods of the poets and the state religions.

Yet, the movement's practices and outlook were partly a reversion to pre-civilized communal worship. Like the

religious rites of the pre-civilized, the worshippers of Dionysos had to be initiated. The cult of Dionysos, like other cults, worshipped together and ate and danced together. Cult members believed that people could reach the supernatural through their emotions.

The new practices were based on the phenomenon of “ecstasy” (ekstasis, “stepping out”). Only when “out of the body” did the soul reveal its true nature—not merely a double of the self, as in Homer—a fallen god, which might be restored to its high estate by a system of “purifications” (katharmoi) and sacraments (orgia).

The Dionysos cult held a special attraction for women, who broke away from domination by males and abandoned their families. On hilltops by night, carrying torches, they danced wildly in self-abandon. The men imagined the women eating raw meat, and suspected the dances ended in sexual as well as spiritual ecstasy. Men and women members of the Dionysian movement travelled about Greece claiming personal intimacy with the gods and proclaiming Dionysos a son of Zeus—a son of God. Some of them made their living by making prophecies and by performing what they believed were ritual purifications and spiritual healings. They told their listeners of a paradise that could be theirs, that they should be aware of the divine origins of their soul, and that through the ecstasy of the movement’s rituals they could let their souls escape from the prison of their body.

They claimed that their movement’s rituals and purification rites would liberate their souls from prevailing evils. They preached that by following the movement’s strict rules of conduct, including living ascetically and not eating animal meat, they could achieve eternal blessedness. They spoke of their being judged after death according to their deeds during life. And they warned people that they would receive either the reward of eternal bliss or they would suffer punishment in Hades.

Men of wealth, power and influence in Greece feared that the worship of Dionysos might become so widespread that it would disrupt the peace and order upon which they depended. But the spread of the worship of Dionysos proved to have limits, as many Greeks wished to hold onto the gods they had grown up with, and as many believed more in reason than in letting their emotions lead them to the acceptance of promises of eternal bliss. The earliest use of “Orpheus” in Greek verse is that of Ibycus who moved from Italy to Samos, the opposite direction from Pythagoras in the reign of Polycrates. Onomicritus, an Athenian banished from the city, spent a long time travelling in Ionia, and helped popularise Orphism as sacred poetry. He spent time at Susa persuading the Persians to attack the Greeks, implying that he spoke Persian. He it was who brought into Orphism its traditional cosmogonic doctrines and salvation beliefs, and it is hard to deny that he was influenced by Zoroastrianism. Subsequently, though, Orphism became extremely syncretistic, and the mixture of additions and revisions have diluted its original content. After all it was poetry and therefore creative literature.

Orphic literature still extant is of late date and uncertain origin, but the thin gold plates, with Orphic verses inscribed on them, discovered at Thourioi and Petelia take us back to a time when Orphism was still a living creed. Orphic observances and rites were to release the soul from the “wheel of birth”—from reincarnation in animal or vegetable forms. The soul then once more became a god and enjoyed everlasting bliss. This closely resembles the beliefs prevalent in India about the same time.

Parallels between Hinduism and the thought of Plato come through the legacy of Pythagoras and the Orphics. The legend of Earth and Heaven as the parents of the gods, the earliest Greek form of which is in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, is common in the *Rig Veda* where water is the primary principle, which develops into the

world through time, desire, intelligence and warmth. Similarly, in the *Iliad*, Oceanus is the “origin of the gods” and the “origin of all the gods.” In the Orphic poems, night is the most ancient goddess, a bird with black wings. Hesiod inclines more to the Orphic view, but there is a similar confusion in the Greek and Vedic accounts of the beginnings, and the confusion lies between the same claimants to the title of first god.

The Orphic communities decided that philosophy is a “way of life.” In Ionia, *philosophia* meant something like “curiosity,” and, from that use of it, the Athenian sense of “culture.” But the word has a deeper meaning wherever Pythagoras has an influence. Philosophy is itself a “purification” and a way of escape from the “wheel.” That is the idea expressed in the *Phaedo*, manifestly inspired by Pythagorean doctrine, and this way of regarding philosophy henceforth exemplified the best Greek thought.

Science, then, became a religion, and to that extent philosophy was influenced by religion. The religious revival implied a new view of the soul, and yet it did not influence the teaching of philosophers on that subject. Even the Pythagoreans and Empedocles, who took part in the religious movement themselves, held views about the soul which flatly contradicted the beliefs implied in their religious practices. There is no room for an immortal soul in any philosophy of this period.

Socrates was the first philosopher to assert the doctrine on rational grounds, and Plato shows him as only half serious in appealing to the Orphics for confirmation of his own teaching. Ancient religion was not a body of doctrine. Nothing was required but that the ritual should be performed correctly and in a proper frame of mind. The worshipper was free to give any explanation of it he pleased. It might be as exalted as that of Pindar and Sophocles or as debased as that of the itinerant mystery-mongers described in Plato's *Republic*. Aristotle said:

The initiated are not supposed to learn anything, but to be affected in a certain way and to be put into a certain frame of mind.

That is why the religious revival could inspire philosophy with a new spirit, but could not at first graft new doctrines on it.

## **Anaximander and Anaximenes**

Anaximander derived the world from the “Boundless” (apeiron), an idea of time and space stretching from and to eternity or infinity—the substance of divinity, something immortal and without origin that is the origin of everything. Yet this is close to the Zoroastrian idea of Ahuramazda, the one uncreated god who dwells in boundless light, and makes the world according to his plan. It is quite different from Hesiod's Theogony in which everything is born to something else, and has paradoxically been much more admired, though admittedly a theogony is quite close to evolution. However, Anaximander *did* suppose that the “Boundless” could have formed other universes inaccessible to our own, an amazingly modern idea. It perhaps stems from the idea of Ahuramazda emanating the Amesha Spentas. His ordering of the heavens is that of the Iranians and different from any subsequent Greek philosopher—the stars are nearest the earth, then the moon and the sun is furthest off. The magi saw the fiery sun as the purest and so the furthest.

Coincidence is excluded. Anaximander's concepts cannot be derived from Greek antecedents, and to suppose that they chanced to burgeon his mind without antecedents, at the very moment when the

Persians were knocking on Ionian doors, would be as preposterous as it is pointless.

M L West

Anaximenes made Aer the prime element but Heraclitus thought it was fire, like the Zoroastrians who thought it permeated all six creations. Heraclitus thought the earth had no fire though it was a terminus of the flow of fire. He took god to be wisdom and called "The Wise" who had no base aspects and guides everything and everyone through the world—Ahuramazda! He also thought the dead body was worse than dung and only fit for scavengers. The Iranians were highly sensitive to the uncleanness of a corpse, and began at about this time to introduce the Towers of Silence. He thought good spirits ascended to the highest heaven of the sun and stars, and lived immortally there watching over good people on earth—implying knowledge of fravashis. Poorer souls were stopped at the moon and then discharged as rain, when they fell back to earth mainly by night and in winter to soak into the earth to Hades. This treatment of opposites, though not Zoroastrian dualism, sounds to have been inspired by it. Heraclitus was opposed to praying to holy images, unlike most Greeks but very Iranian, and he opposed falsehood, conceit and drunkenness.

It was the Zoroastrians who led the Greeks to consider the infinite "beyond the visible sky" that led to science, and the transcendentalism of Platonism. Greek philosophy began, not on the Greek archipelago which remained primitive for another century, but in Asia, near or in the Persian empire. More...

- ☐ Anaximander of Miletus
- ☐ Pythagoras of Samos
- ☐ Xenophanes of Colophon
- ☐ Heraclitus of Ephesus
- ☐ Parmenides of Elea
- ☐ Empedocles of Acragas
- ☐ Anaxagoras of Clazomenae
- ☐ The Pythagoreans

These pages are little more than selections from John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, which is accessible on the net and is a remarkable source in which all the ancient fragments known to Burnet are quoted for his comments. Frank E Smitha has a superb historical website, albeit uncritical of traditional religious ideas, called Antiquity Online, for which we are grateful for some of the observations here.

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## PERSIA & CREATION OF JUDAISM

### Book 7. Persians and Greeks

#### Inventing a Religion

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#### Rousseau

In modern times, remarkable instances of utterly artificial religions are quite common. Scientology is perhaps the main example, starting as a wager and continuing to this day as a joke taken seriously by many Americans, often wealthy ones.

Voltaire and the other eighteenth-century philosophers, who held religions to be inventions, had been scorned as superficial, yet Rousseau did it, fulfilling the aspiration of French society for something simpler, juster, more true to nature, more logical than what they had. In the middle of the eighteenth century, he preached a doctrine that took the world by storm, and soon left it in the ruins from which the modern world grew. How did he discover his gospel? He tells us:

Buried in the forest, I sought, I found there the image of primitive ages, whose history I boldly traced. I made havoc of men's petty lies; I dared to unveil and strip naked man's true nature, to follow up the course of time and of the circumstances that had disfigured it, and, comparing man as men had made him with man as nature made him, to demonstrate that the so-called improvements [of civilisation] had been the source of all his woes.

*Confessions 7*

Rousseau had invented a pseudo-history which he fervently believed, and persuaded other people to believe too. Taken up as a religion, it inspired heroes, and enabled a barefoot rabble to beat the finest regular armies in the world. He gave what was needed at that time, what seemed self-evident and therefore needing no proof. People at once recognized his statements on the "state of nature" and the "social contract," as eternal truths. Further investigation was superfluous.

What Christians and Jews do not or will not accept is that their own religions were no less phony. These pages have aimed to show that Judaism was invented by the Persians as an instrument of their national policy, and Christianity was invented by the Ron Hubbards of their day, beginning with Paul, a Roman spy and *agent provocateur* seeking to weaken Jewish nationalism and the distinctions between Jew and gentile to ease the tension in the near east. How did they do it?

Japan was an example—another case of religion building and on a national scale. Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935), Emeritus Professor of Japanese and Philology at the Imperial university of Tokyo, Japan in 1912 wrote a pamphlet, *The Invention of a New Religion* ([The Project Gutenberg](#) [Etext #2510]), showing how the Japanese ruling class was building a new religion for the Japanese. This interesting pamphlet reveals a lot about how the religions of Judaism and Christianity were formed.

#### Mikado-Worship



Up to the year 1888, everything foreign in Japan was hailed as perfect—everything old and national was condemned. Sentiment grew democratic. Love of country seemed likely to yield to foreign models. Officialdom took fright at this loss of national pride. Something had to be done.

In the nineteenth century, the Japanese were an irreligious people and admitted it themselves. Fukuzawa wrote: "I lack a religious nature, and had never believed in any religion." Educated Japanese saw the educated European as superstitious, and preoccupied with other-worldly matters. Japanese could not comprehend how supposed spiritual leaders like the Pope, or the Archbishop of Canterbury, could be so revered and important. Yet the bureaucrats saw some advantage in it. They manufactured a religion from the turn of the twentieth century to serve the purposes of their rulers—Mikado-worship.

It was a new religion of loyalty and patriotism, consciously put together by the official class, to serve the interests of that class. Patriotic sentiment was appealed to through Japan's throne, supposedly of hoary antiquity, a unique line of absolute monarchs compared with the short-lived dynasties of China.

Shinto, a nature cult which had fallen into discredit, was taken as a basis with sound Japanese credentials. The governing class insisted on the Shinto doctrine that the Mikado descends in direct succession from the native Goddess of the Sun, and that he was a living god on earth who claimed the absolute fealty of his subjects. Laws and constitutions were but free gifts on his part, not in any sense popular rights. The practice was established in all schools of bowing down several times yearly before the Emperor's picture.

Shinto, because connected with the Imperial Family, was to be alone honoured. Ministers and officials who carried on the Mikado's government, were not just public servants, but executives of the supernatural authority. The attendance of officials at certain Shinto services was required. The Japanese bureaucracy became like the priesthood in later Judaea, and to some extent like the Egyptian and Indian priesthoods, not only governing, but aspiring to lead in cultural matters, and to have the people kow tow to it in exaggerated respect. The right of burial, never before possessed by Shinto, was granted to its priests. Then the right of marriage was granted likewise—an entirely novel departure in a land where marriage had never been more than a civil contract. Thus the Shinto priesthood was encouraged to penetrate into the intimacy of family life, while in another direction it encroached on the field of ethics by borrowing bits here and there from Confucian and even from Christian sources.

All military successes were ascribed to the miraculous influence of the Emperor's virtue, and to the virtues of His Imperial and divine ancestors—former Emperors and Shinto deities. Imperial envoys were regularly sent after each great victory to carry the good tidings to the Sun Goddess at her great shrine at Ise. The new legend was encouraged by means of a new set of festivals celebrating Imperial official events.

The schools were the great strongholds of the new propaganda. History was so taught to the young as to focus everything upon the new truths, and to diminish as far as possible the contrast between ancient and modern conditions. Army and navy recruits were taught the same. The traditional mythology of Shinto was played down. Instead a new mythology was presented as "historical facts," such as the alleged foundation of the monarchy in 660 BC. Only what passes for history in the Judaeo-Christian bible, where Moses, David, Solomon, and so on, are accepted as authentic people, is as absurd.

The true origins of Japanese history were as recent as that of European countries. The first glimmer of genuine Japanese history dates from the fifth century AD, and even the accounts of what happened in the sixth century must be received with caution. Japanese scholars knew this, but the Japanese bureaucracy would not hear it and exacted belief in every iota of the national historic myth, characterised by miraculous impossibilities.

The chronology was palpably fraudulent and the speeches put into the mouths of ancient Mikados were from the Chinese classics. Some of their names were also from Chinese sources. (Here, some scholars in the eighties were declaring what earlier scholars had ignored—that clear elements of the Greek classics could be found in the Jewish scriptures.) The earliest Japanese historical narratives, the earliest known social usages, and even the centralized Imperial form of Government itself, were all adapted from classical China. Moral ideals from the teaching of the Chinese sages, like loyalty and filial piety, the virtues on which, in the Far-Eastern world, all the others rest, were attributed to Imperial Ancestors. Beneficent sovereigns had always been in perfect concord with the gratefully loyal people, who had never been disobedient and rebellious. The Japanese nation had been blessed by a high-minded chivalry called Bushido, a supernatural virtue of its rulers.

## **Bushido**

Bushido was unknown until the end of the nineteenth century! The word appears in no dictionary before the year 1900. It was never once alluded to it in the voluminous writings of Kaempfer, Siebold, Satow, nor Rein—all men who knew Japan by heart. Japan had its chivalrous people but Bushido, as an institution or a code of rules, had never existed. In a short lifetime, the new Japanese religion of loyalty and patriotism emerged into the light of day, and the feats accomplished during the last war show that the simple ideal which it offered was capable of inspiring heroic deeds—and foul ones too.

Medieval Japanese history shows that the great feudal houses, far from showing fealty to one emperor, one lord, or one party, had evolved the eminently practical plan of letting their different members take different sides, so that the family as a whole might come out as winner in any event, and avoid the confiscation of its lands. From the beginning of authentic history down to within the memory of living men, emperors had been deposed, assassinated, exiled and murdered in exile, and for centuries every succession to the throne was the signal for intrigues and sanguinary broils. For centuries, the government was in the hands of mayors of the palace, who substituted one infant sovereign for another, generally forcing each to abdicate as soon as he approached man's estate. In the fourteenth century, two rival Imperial lines defied each other for fifty-eight years.

The new Japanese religion consisted of worship of the sacrosanct Emperor and his Divine Ancestors, of obedience to him as head of the army—a position contrary to all former Japanese ideas, for the court was civilian—of a belief that Japan was superior to the other nations just as the Mikado was divinely superior to other kings and emperors. Japan was created first, the “Land of the Gods,” while all other countries came from the drops that fell from the creator's spear when he had finished his main work.

The Reverend Dr Ebina, one of the leading lights of the Protestant pastorate in Japan when Chamberlain wrote his brochure, accepted the doctrine that the whole Japanese nation were gods:

Though the encouragement of ancestor-worship cannot be regarded as part of the essential teaching of

Christianity, [Christianity] was not opposed to the notion that, when the Japanese Empire was founded, its early rulers were in communication with the Great Spirit that rules the universe. Christians, according to this theory, without doing violence to their creed, may acknowledge that the Japanese nation has a divine origin. It was only when we realize that the Imperial Ancestors were in close communion with God (or the Gods), that we understand how sacred was the country in which we live.

If Japanese Christians could think like this, the non-Christian majority must have been devout Emperor-worshippers and Japan-worshippers. The peasantry continued to prefer Buddhism. Popular festivals were Buddhist. Buddhist also were the temples where they buried their dead. The common people clung to the Buddhist beliefs of their fathers but they could not resist the propaganda of the state.

The spread of the new ideas was easy, as it always is when a large class derived power from their diffusion, while no one in particular opposed them. The disinterested love of truth for its own sake was rare, and the patience to unearth it was rarer still. Patriotism worked in the interests of credulity. How could men not believe in a system that produced such excellent practical results, a system which united all the scattered elements of national feeling into one focus, and thus created a powerful instrument for the attainment of national aims? Thus a generation grew up not suspecting that its cherished beliefs were mere inventions.

The new religion lacked one important item—a sacred book. Imperial Rescripts raised to that rank, accompanied doubtless by an authoritative commentary, as their style was too abstruse to be understood of the people, would suffice. A volume on the whole duty of Japanese man, with selected Imperial poems as texts, duly appeared.

## **Persuading Others**

The West in the twentieth-century found its moral and political Eldorado in distant Japan, a land of fabulous antiquity and incredible virtues. The Japanese officials obliged and the national pride they were inculcating took over. Lectures were delivered, books were written in English, French and German, periodicals were brought out, minute care was lavished on concealment, patching-up, and glossing-over. How could a foreigner imagine that people who made such positive statements about their own country were merely exploiting the stranger's credulity? Onlookers had no reason to suspect, and even if they did, original sources were out of their reach.

The position of Western investigators vis-a-vis Japan differed entirely from that of Japanese vis-a-vis the West. The Japanese had every facility for studying and understanding Europe and the US. Westerners were warded off by well-nigh insuperable obstacles from understanding Japan. Japan lies in the shadow, away on the rim of the world. Visitors were never left to form their own opinion of things.

Japan's speech, marvellously intricate, almost defied acquisition. Having mastered this difficult vernacular, the student discovered that literary works, even newspapers and ordinary correspondence, were not composed in it, but in another dialect, partly antiquated, partly artificial, differing as widely from the colloquial speech as Latin is from Italian. Finally, Japanese thought barricaded itself behind the walls of an extraordinarily complicated system of writing. Yet the foreigner had to learn this too. Only a missionary or a consular official with a life appointment ever could. The Japanese knew everything there was to know about us, but Europeans could know little about them. Thus the neo-Japanese myths of dates, Emperors, heroes, and astonishing national virtues

found their way into popular English books, current literature, and even reference books.

Japanese officialdom acted naturally in not allowing the light to be let in, because the roots of the faith it has planted need darkness in which to grow and spread. Few religions can survive a birth subjected to critical scrutiny. Thus also were explained the rigours of the Japanese bureaucracy against the native liberals, who, in its eyes, appeared, not simply as political opponents, but as traitors to the chosen people—sacrilegious heretics defying the authority of the One and Only True Church.

## **Judaism and Christianity**

What happened in Japan was not exceptional. Normal religious and political change proceeds thus.

The classic instance of the invention of a new national religion was furnished in Yehud of the post-exilic period. The piecing together, then, of a brand-new system under an ancient name is now so well understood, and has been so closely described on these pages, that little need be said here. Works which every critic can now see to be relatively modern were ascribed to Moses, David, or Daniel; intricate laws and ordinances that had never been practised—could never have been practised—were represented as ancient institutions; a whole new way of thinking and acting was set in motion on the assumption that it was old. Yet, so far as was known, no one in or out of Palestine ever saw through the illusion for over two thousand years. Nineteenth and twentieth century scholars had to draw aside the veil hiding the facts.

In Yehud, a revolutionized and unhappy present required a changed attitude towards the past. Substitute the Persians for the Japanese bureaucracy and the parallels are clear. Oral tradition and the scraps of written records that had survived the wreckage of the kingdom, elements of Assyrian lists of kings, Mesopotamian myth and a subset of the Zoroastrian monotheistic religion were arranged into a new order. A few gifted individuals applied literary methods of pseudepigraphy which would now be branded as fraudulent if they were not holy writings. The pressing need of building a national polity for their present on their chosen basis—Yahouah worship—obliged them into falsifying the past to make it fit.

The kaleidoscope having been turned, the pattern would change of its own accord. People can always believe that which it was greatly to their interest to believe. The question was one of life and death for the Jewish colonists. Thousands of people in our own society cling to the doctrine of a future life on no strong evidence. It was enormously important to the Japanese ruling class, like the Jewish one, that the mental attitude sketched above should become universal among their countrymen. Accordingly, they achieved the impossible.

We believe in it, although we know that it is not true.

Tertullian said nearly the same thing, and no Christian ever doubted his sincerity.